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LETTERS

ADDRESSED TO THE

INHABITANTS OF CORK,

OCCASIONED

BY THE

Stoncks (S.D.)

CIRCULATION OF A WORK,

ENTITLED,

The Age of Reason, &c.

IN THAT CITY.

CORK:

PRINTED AND SOLD BY J. HALY, KING'S-ARMS, EXCHANGE.

1795.

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PRINTED AND SOLD BY J. WILKINS, ST. PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL, CORK.

1825

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T. D. HINCKS.

Cork, 12th February, 1795.

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T. D. HICKS

Gen. 1. 1. 1732

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LETTERS

ADDRESSED TO THE

INHABITANTS OF CORK.

LETTER I.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

A WORK has lately been circulated amongst you with much industry, and, if I have been rightly informed, with considerable success, which calls for the exertions of all who are satisfied of the truth of Revelation and regard the doctrines of Christianity as closely connected with the present and future happiness of mankind. Had this work been permitted to take the usual course, and only one or two copies of it reached this part of the Kingdom, I should not have thought of troubling you with any remarks, but have trusted to the answers which have been or will be published in other places, and to the many excellent works which have been written in support of the evidences of Revelation. But when some persons, with a zeal which I cannot think laudable, which perhaps deserves reprehension, have rendered it by their exertions a *local* publication, and have caused its dispersion amongst those, who from their situation in life, are unable of themselves to see the false reasoning it contains, it is incumbent on those, whose education and course of study have led them to investigate the subject, to endeavour to assist their brethren, and prevent them if possible from forsaking the clear and pleasant streams of Religion, for the muddy and bitter waters of infidelity. With this view, this and the following Letters are addressed to you.

The

The publication to which I have alluded, is entitled *The Age of Reason, being an investigation of true and fabulous theology*, and it is written by *Thomas Paine*, a man who has acquired much celebrity by his political writings, and whose name is therefore calculated to promote the circulation of any work. The title which the author has arrogantly, if not insidiously prefixed, intimates his design of shewing that Christianity is inconsistent with reason, and that it is to be considered only as a kind of *fabulous theology*.

There are no objections contained in this Pamphlet which have not been already urged, and in the opinion of most who have examined both sides of the question, completely refuted. Like most professors of infidelity* the writer seems to have viewed Revelation only under the mask of prejudice, and to have hastily adopted an opinion which a more full and candid view of the subject might have shewn him the impropriety of. Unable to judge the heart of a fellow-creature, I shall not dispute that purity of intention to which Mr. Paine lays claim, nor shall I encourage the supposition that he does not believe what he has published. Like others who have held similar opinions, he may be sincere, and he is certainly more honest than those, who agreeing with him in opinion pretend a zeal for Christianity, and openly deplore that apparent decline in which they secretly rejoice, and which their own conduct has a tendency to promote. At the same time I must condemn that confidence in his own judgment which has led him to disseminate opinions respecting which he is in a great measure very ill-informed, and which, though they may have been confirmed

* Mr. Paine in making some very just remarks on *mental lying*, as he terms it, and the practice of men's subscribing to articles they do not believe, has introduced a new definition of the word infidelity. — *Infidelity*, says he, *does not consist in believing, or disbelieving, it consists in a man's professing to believe what he does not believe*. Notwithstanding this assertion I am still inclined to think the proper meaning of infidelity to be unbelief, or scepticism; I have therefore continued to use it, in that sense, as not liable to be misunderstood. What Mr. Paine reprobates may more properly be termed hypocrisy. The difference between the words will perhaps appear more strongly by remarking, that if we speak of a person who denies Revelation, we call him an infidel or unbeliever, but when we speak of a man *who professes to believe what he really does not*, then we say he is an hypocrite. Had not Mr. Paine in consequence of early prejudices, entertained such a contempt for the *dead study of dead languages*, he would not have fallen into this mistake, as there is no word, the derivation of which points out its meaning more distinctly than *infidelity*.

confirmed by long habit, do not seem to have been originally the result of deep and impartial investigation, especially when those opinions, thus arrogantly asserted, have a tendency to weaken, if not destroy the principles of Virtue and Religion so useful to society, and to rob men of their best support under the calamities of life. But whatever praise or blame attach itself to the conduct of the writer, the work is now in possession of many amongst you, and though I cannot think the arguments contained in it against Religion, have much weight, yet there are several circumstances which render it necessary to prepare an antidote for the poison it contains. There is no writer I have ever met with who possesses the power of rendering what he says plain and striking in a greater degree than Mr. Paine, so that his arguments are not so much to be dreaded from their own weight, as from the importance which he is thus enabled to give them. Another circumstance which renders his work dangerous, is his want of method, and his constant practice of drawing conclusions which the premises will not warrant, by which means he imposes upon the greater part of his readers, his language being often more calculated to deceive than to instruct. The high opinion which many have formed, and probably some amongst you, of his abilities and integrity, also leads them to receive whatever comes from his pen as deserving credit, and blindly to give up their judgments to his guidance. On this account though this work appears to me to contain no argument of much weight against Christianity in general, it has certainly gained much attention, and has probably done more harm, than any former publication of the same kind, not even excepting Mr. Hume's famous objection to miracles, which has been repeated and conveyed in plainer and more striking language by the author of *The Age of Reason*. There is another circumstance to be observed, which is, that the greater part of Mr. Paine's arguments affect only particular doctrines, concerning the truth of which Christians are much divided amongst themselves. Any arguments used against these cannot affect Christianity in general, unless the author had previously proved, that they were necessarily connected with it, which I cannot find that he has attempted; for supposing his arguments against them to be perfectly convincing, yet still they would only prove the fallacy or absurdity of those doctrines, and the corruption of pure Christianity, not that all Revelation is a fiction unworthy of our notice; yet this mode of arguing from the fallacy of particular tenets, to the fallacy of the whole of Revelation so frequent

frequent in Mr. Paine's work, absurd and false as it is, has been commonly made use of by all those who pretend to more reason and wisdom than the rest of their fellow-creatures. I shall leave these doctrines for those to defend, who believing in them, feel an inclination to do so. And desirous of rendering these Letters useful to all of you, my fellow-citizens, however various your opinions and modes of worship, I shall endeavour to confine myself to those great leading principles in which we all agree, and to prove that there has been a divine Revelation; that Jesus Christ was a divine teacher; and that the truth of his divine mission is confirmed both by miracles and prophecy. In doing this I do not pretend to remove every difficulty which may occur, as this would extend the work beyond due bounds; I shall esteem it sufficient if I can shew that the preponderance of evidence is on the side of Christianity, and let me entreat you to attend to the arguments I shall use with candour, and with a desire to know the truth, and should your minds have been strongly impressed with a disbelief of particular doctrines held by the societies to which you belong, do not therefore reject Religion altogether, but soliciting the aid of God, that he would send the spirit of truth to lead you into all truth, examine the evidence with all the impartiality you are able, and act steadily according to the conviction of your minds. And may God the Almighty Father of us all, give success to my endeavours; may he render me the humble instrument of confirming such of you as believe, and convincing those who waver; and may this defence of those great points in which we all agree, conduce to promote and strengthen that love and harmony which should actuate all the Disciples of Christ, and which has too often been lost sight of from a zeal for particular doctrines!

LETTER

LETTER II.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

HAVING undertaken the task of defending revealed Religion from the attacks of Mr. Paine, and of shewing that there is a decided preponderance of evidence in favour of divine Revelation, I shall not attempt to follow him through his irregularities, but shall endeavour to treat the subject more methodically, and shall first make some general remarks on the nature of evidence. Prophecy and Miracles have been justly called the *grand pillars* upon which the evidence of revealed Religion rests. That Prophecies were really delivered at the time, and accomplished in the manner in which the advocates for divine Revelation contend that they were so delivered and accomplished, and that the miraculous events alledged in favour of the divine authority of the Gospel really took place, are facts the credibility of which rests wholly on the evidence of human testimony; since none will pretend to say that there is a miracle wrought upon each of us to prove the truth of these facts. Of evidence, which is the means by which the mind acquires the knowledge of truth, there are five kinds. The first is the evidence of *Sense*, by which we acquire the knowledge of whatever falls under the cognizance of our senses, such as the existence, properties, and powers of external objects; and we rely with certainty on this evidence when our organs are in a sound state, and the object in a proper situation. Another kind of evidence is *Consciousness*, by which we learn the existence, faculties, and operations of our own minds. On this we rely with infallible certainty, but it extends to nothing beyond ourselves. *Intuition*, is a third kind of evidence, and upon this, which is the immediate perception of the agreement or disagreement of our ideas in certain circumstances, we rely without any hesitation. But though Intuitive propositions may be formed with respect to every idea which subsists in the mind, useful truths of this sort are comparatively few. Another kind of evidence is *Reasoning*, when a third idea is introduced, from the relation of which to two given ideas their mutual agreement or disagreement is inferred. Most of our rational knowledge is derived from this species, which may be entirely depended upon when every link of the chain is firm, but in the course of long deductions the want of proper intermediate ideas, and the narrow limits of the human mind render it very liable to error. The last kind of evidence,

and that which is the particular object of our present enquiry is *Testimony*, by which we learn the existence of facts in times and places to which our own observation does not extend; this is the source of all our historical knowledge, and of much of what is called scientifick; by it we decide the most important concerns in life, and on it the evidence of divine Revelation rests. It will appear to you on consideration, that this kind of evidence is in its nature weaker than any of the rest, since men are liable to error in their observations of facts, and still more in their recollection of them. They may commit mistakes in transmitting accounts of them to others, they may misunderstand each other's meaning, and they may wilfully deceive. These are disadvantages certainly attendant upon testimony and they give a plausibility to that contempt in which Mr. Paine speaks of *Hearsay evidence*. Yet there are instances in which from a concurrence of circumstances we may as safely and as confidently depend upon human testimony as upon any other kind of evidence. Now the faith which we have in any testimony arises from our experience that it may be depended upon since we have generally found that there is a correspondence between what is asserted by men, and the things or events which their assertions respect. Thus if one person tells me that the tide has risen so high as to overflow the streets, and I find by the evidence of my senses, or any other evidence, that this is actually the case, then I am satisfied that his information was true. If I find by repeated experience that the same person never does deceive me, I conclude that there must be a sufficient *cause* for this *constant appearance* and that in the same circumstances, the same effect may be depended upon. And if notwithstanding a number of impositions, I find that among mankind at large, a regard to truth greatly prevails over falshood, I conclude that there is in general sufficient ground for faith in testimony. On examining this more closely I find what those cases are in which testimony is most apt to deceive: those, for instance, in which men either have not opportunity of being well informed themselves, or those in which they have an interest in deceiving others. And separating these from other cases of human testimony, I consider reports as fully credible, the relators of which had competent means of information, and could have had no intention of deceiving others, and to such reports I readily give my assent. *Single persons* however may be so circumstanced, that though in appearance they may have had sufficient means of information, and we can discover in them no design of imposing upon others, yet from some unknown

known cause, their testimony may be defective on one or both of these accounts. But when we have the concurrent testimony of *different persons* unconnected with each other, equally competent judges of what they relate, and to appearance equally impartial, that defect in the evidence is removed; it being highly improbable that the same or different unknown influences should affect many different persons no way connected with each other. In this case, when many original and competent witnesses agree, we seldom entertain the least doubt of the truth of testimony; nor can we perceive any sensible difference between our belief in the existence of such cities as London and Rome, and in that of the city we inhabit. Though our knowledge of the latter is derived from the evidence of our senses, and of the former from that of human testimony, yet we feel almost as full a conviction of the one as of the other. The want of connection between several original witnesses will be confirmed, and consequently their testimony will be strengthened, if, in the relation of the same event, they agree in important facts, but vary in minute particulars. For such a variance forms a strong presumption that they had no concealed plan of imposing upon their readers. Thus, for example, if a man were accused of any crime, and on his trial three or four witnesses were produced against him, all of whom agreed in proving the material facts of which he was accused, but who differed in the mode of relating them, and in some trifling circumstances of no great consequence which from many causes might strike them differently, would not any of you, if on the jury of the accused person, give more weight to their evidence on this account than if they agreed in every minute particular? Would you not think in the former case that each witness spoke from his own observation, and in the latter, that there was a probability of their having planned the tale in concert, with a view to deceive you and to deprive an innocent man of his life? Such considerations would no doubt influence your verdict. Another circumstance which will affect the evidence, is the probability of the fact. If we have reason to think it probable that such an event would take place, we find no difficulty in believing it on very slender evidence; but if it is in its own nature improbable, the evidence must be proportionably strong. Were a person, concerning whom we knew nothing, to come and tell us during severe weather in the month of January, that there had been a great fall of snow in the country, we should not hesitate to give our assent because it is highly probable, but were a person to tell us the same thing in the month of July, we

should require very strong evidence because our own experience has taught us that such a circumstance is very improbable. Suppose now three or four persons whose integrity you have no reason to question, and who had every opportunity of acquiring good information, have related to you any circumstance which is not in its nature highly improbable, and that in such a manner as to induce you to think they had not concerted a story with each other, would you not be inclined to believe the testimony of such persons? If then these witnesses were to persist in their account in opposition to their own apparent interest, if they were to submit to sufferings and even to death itself in attestation of the truth of what they relate, would not this add weight to their testimony, and prove beyond a doubt their own full conviction of the truth of their story? Satisfactory however as this concurrence of circumstances would render testimony, it is capable of receiving additional weight. For were any monuments of the events recorded to remain in the world, or were there any circumstances or appearances which could not be reasonably accounted for, otherwise than upon the supposition of the truth of such reports, it would add greatly to their credibility; thus the French phrases which are used in giving the royal assent to acts of Parliament, and on other occasions, cannot well be accounted for, but on the supposition of the truth of what is related respecting the Norman conquest, and therefore add weight to the credibility of that event. Again, if it was the interest, or the wish of any persons to have contradicted the report; if it was in their power to have demonstrated the falshood of it, had it not been true; and if it is reasonable to believe that they would have spared no pains for this purpose; and yet if they were silent upon the occasion, much more if they acknowledge the truth of the facts, would not this greatly corroborate the evidence? Finally, if any doctrine supported by facts so established, make its way and prevail in opposition to all the prejudices, interests, and wishes of mankind, might not this be considered as a strong additional argument of the truth of the fact upon which the doctrine rests? Such are the circumstances which give weight to testimony, and when they are all united in support of any fact, you will allow, I think, that it rests upon evidence fully sufficient to authorise belief. In a future Letter, I hope to prove to your satisfaction, that all these circumstances conspire to establish the truth of the facts on which Christianity rests, and that therefore they are worthy of belief, notwithstanding the cavil about *hearsay evidence*, and the insinuation that there are at least millions to one, that the reporters of them are liars.

LETTER

LETTER III.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

MR. PAINE in different parts of his work endeavours to impress upon his readers that there is no occasion for any Revelation, since God speaks to all men by his works, and teaches them their duty; thus adopting the opinion of those Deistical writers who in former days asserted that a divine Revelation was inexpedient, and therefore impossible, *for that the law of nature is so perfect as to admit of no addition, and the light of nature is so clear and universal, as to need no assistance.* This opinion has been combated very fully both from reason and fact by many able writers, yet our author has not deemed it necessary to notice any of their arguments, which leads me to imagine, that like many others, having examined only one side of the question, or having relied too much on *thoughts which bolted into his mind of their own accord*, he was entirely unacquainted with them. As their arguments however appear to me unanswerable, I shall make use of them on the present occasion. *The word of God, says Mr. Paine, is the Creation we behold, and it is in this word which no human invention can counterfeit or alter, that God speaketh universally to man. It does not depend on the will of man, whether it shall be published or not; it publishes itself from one end of the earth to the other. It preaches to all nations and to all worlds; and this word of God reveals to man all that it is necessary for man to know of God.* Other passages to the same effect will occur to such of you as have read the work, and perhaps they have made no small impression on your minds. You may imagine, that if the works of God teach so plainly to *all men*, without any trouble or learning, what they ought to do, there could be no occasion for a Revelation of God's will to them in any other manner. All persons who have attended to the works of God will readily allow that much useful instruction is to be derived from them, and will assent to many of the conclusions which Mr. Paine has deduced. From them we are enabled to prove the existence and perfections of the great first cause, a belief in which is certainly the foundation of all Religion. But it does not therefore follow that *it reveals all which is necessary for man to know of God* and the duties which he owes to him. Nor do I think that it can properly be called *Revelation*. Mr. Paine indeed defines Revelation to be *something communicated immediately from God to man*, meaning by

by *immediately*, that it flows *directly* from God to each individual, and not through the medium of another person. But this I imagine is not the usual sense in which the word is used, and the change of signification is only calculated to confuse the reader, though this might not have been the author's intention. To reveal * originally signifies to discover or make known something which was before a secret, and Revelation in a religious use is God's making known himself or his will, either directly or through the medium of another person, above what he has done by the light of nature. Mr. Locke, in his justly admired Essay on the human understanding, has marked out the distinction between Reason and Revelation in the following manner. "Reason is natural Revelation, whereby the eternal Father of light and fountain of all knowledge, communicates to mankind, that portion of truth which he has laid within the reach of their *natural faculties*. Revelation is natural Reason enlarged by a new set of discoveries communicated by God immediately, (*i. e.* as I conjecture from the context, not through the medium of his works) which reason vouches the truth of, by the testimony and proofs it gives, that they come from God." To call the *works of God* a Revelation seems then improper because whatever they teach us is by the light of nature, and not by an extraordinary communication. But not to take up your time with a dispute about the meaning of a word, the question to be decided is plainly this:—Are men by reason alone, capable of attaining a knowledge of every thing which it is necessary for them to know concerning God and their duty? Mr. Paine says they are; the professors of Christianity maintain that they are not, and it is for each of you

* It is one advantage derived from an acquaintance with the dead languages, that we are enabled to understand better the meaning of those words, which have been introduced from them into our own; and, as we have not yet attained the faculty of imparting our ideas to others but through the medium of language, which like all other human things, is liable to many imperfections and abuses, it may be prudent on this account, not entirely to abolish the study of them, lest writers like Mr. Paine, who rely on genius alone, without the aid of literature or the toil of investigation, encrease that inconstancy in the use of words already too great, and instead of advancing, render moral science more difficult than it is at present. It is not a part of my design to vindicate the system of education, nor the use of dead languages, but I would just observe, that if some have laid an unnecessary stress upon them, as superior to science, Mr. Paine has fallen into the opposite extreme;

Est modus in rebus, sunt certi denique fines
Quos ultra citraque nequit consistere rectum,

you, after examining the arguments by *your reason*, to determine which you will believe—I say by *your reason*, for I can assure you, notwithstanding Mr. Paine's assertion, that Christians so far from *despising reason*, appeal to it with confidence, and it is by the help of this excellent gift of God, that they are enabled to establish the truth of Revelation. Let me then ask you whether you think it probable that the generality of mankind, if left entirely to themselves, would have acquired just ideas of religious truth, and of the nature, sanctions, and obligations of virtue? Would they have discovered the perfections of the Supreme Being, which we are now capable of proving from his works? And if they had, would they have inferred from them the necessity of pleasing this Being, by an imitation of those perfections? Before you answer me, I would entreat you to consider, that most men have not leisure for pursuing such enquiries, for these discoveries could only be the result of long investigation. We find that men have not leisure for them now, nor had they in former periods; they have ever been too much engaged in the bustling scenes of life, providing for their wants, and pursuing the phantoms of ambition, avarice, or pleasure, which afforded little time to contemplate the works of God, in such a manner as would be necessary for deriving from them the instruction Mr. Paine supposes. And even though they had all the leisure which is necessary, and were placed in circumstances every way favourable, yet can we say they would have inclination for such reflections? Do we find men in general inclined to make use of their advantages in this respect? Or does your own experience teach you, that they often admire the beauties of the Creation, often observe the starry Heavens, the various tribes of living things which surround them, and all the wonderful works of God, without ever raising their thoughts to him and inferring the divinity of the author; and still more without ever drawing one moral conclusion respecting their conduct in life? To trace out the principles of natural Religion in their due connection and evidence is a very difficult task: for there is a wide difference between discovering a system of truth, and discerning the reasonableness of it when discovered and proposed to us. We who live in the midst of light can scarcely even form a conception of the obscurity, confusion, and uncertainty which may have perplexed the thoughts of the wisest men in the ages of darkness. It probably required greater efforts of reasoning than we are apt upon first thoughts to imagine, to ascertain points which are now looked upon

as obvious to the meanest capacity. We should pause then, before we attribute to the perfection of our reasoning powers, that which may be only the result of the situation in which we have been placed. Knowledge in other sciences is allowed by all to have been progressive; if therefore the knowledge of divine things is to be attained by reason only, we may infer that it also would be progressive. Whether it has been so or not will be considered in another place: let us at present attend to the inconsistency of Mr. Paine on the subject. Theological and scientific learning are both, according to him, derived from reason alone, contemplating the works of God. One would imagine therefore that he supposed them to be similar in other circumstances; but this is by no means the case. *Scientific learning*, he thinks, *was derived to us chiefly from the Greeks, or persons speaking the Greek language*; but it has been greatly improved, and is capable of receiving such additional improvement, that having the advantage of translations, time should not be wasted in learning the original, lest enough should not remain for the advancement of science. But theology, he seems to imagine, arrived at perfection all at once, and every man, in every age, without any assistance from the experience of his predecessors, is alike capable of understanding it. For what else can he mean by *the Creation being an ever-existing original which every man can read, and its revealing to man all that is necessary for him to know concerning God*, when Revelation cannot take place through the medium of another person? All men then are alike capable of discerning God's will from his works, and there is no more need for the superior abilities or exertions of some individuals in discovering our duty, than for the labour of others in explaining it. And it is peculiarly difficult for a person to receive assistance from one who spoke a different language, for though all the useful books in science are translated, and these translations will answer all the purposes of the original, yet when Religion is the subject, *it is impossible to translate from one language into another, not only without losing a great part of the original, but frequently of mistaking the sense*; it is only therefore by *the universal language of the works of God*, which all men understand, that true religious knowledge can be communicated. I own I have been unable to discover what could induce Mr. Paine with such sentiments, to *publish his thoughts on Religion* at all; and particularly, why he should make an offering of them to his French constituents, and his fellow-citizens of all nations, in the English language, when he

is so very sensible of the impossibility of translating them.— Leaving these inconsistencies of the self-elected priest of reason, let us return to the subject, and let me ask you, can you take upon you to say, that had you not been instructed in the existence of a God and his perfections, you should ever have discovered them from your own observation? Do you think that every man amongst you, however engaged in worldly pursuits, or however indifferent about such enquiries, would be able as he *ran along to read* infinite power, wisdom, and goodness in the Creation, to infer that the Being who made it delighted in virtue, and expected it in his creatures, to find out what those virtues were that he ought to practice, and to deduce even the *probability* of existing hereafter, and being then rewarded or punished according to his present conduct? Supposing that you devoted time to the consideration, have you such confidence in your own powers as to imagine yourselves capable of such discoveries? But though every man is not able to find out the truths of Religion, yet it is possible, you may say, that some person of a contemplative and inquisitive mind, who exercises his reason to the best advantage, or at least a society of such men by their joint enquiries, may discover a complete system of religion and morals: it is not for me to determine how far the powers of the human mind can go in particular circumstances, but supposing them to have attained this valuable knowledge, would it be an easy task for them to instruct the generality of mankind, to gain their attention, to convince their understandings, to overcome their prejudices, and above all to enforce the practice of virtue by proper authority? Would not such men with only the *reasonableness* of their doctrine to recommend them, expose themselves not only to contempt but to persecution, and probably pay for their intrusion with their lives? There seems then little probability that the bulk of mankind if left to themselves, would acquire just ideas of religious truth, and of the nature, sanctions, and obligations of virtue. The question however of most importance is concerning the fact, whether what has been so boldly asserted, is agreeable to the experience of past ages, which I shall examine in the next Letter.

C LETTER

LETTER IV.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

IT is asserted by Mr. Paine *that the Creation preaches to all nations, and all worlds, and reveals to man all that is necessary for man to know of God.* As it must have done the same in former times if it does so now, the true question is, what was the actual state of the world with respect to Religion and morals, previous to the publication of the Christian dispensation, for if mankind had not the glorious advantage of a constant, immutable, clear, and universal revelation in the works of God previous to this period, you will scarcely be induced to imagine that they have acquired it since. In discussing then this question of fact, it may first be observed that many of the heathen philosophers of the greatest abilities, and the most inquisitive minds, who were placed in the most advantageous situations for enquiry, who had the best means of information, and who had devoted a great part of their time to this purpose, fell into the most egregious errors, both with respect to the attributes and providence of the Supreme Being, and the nature, obligations, and sanctions of virtue. This assertion indeed seems to be contradicted by one of Mr. Paine's, who whilst he allows *that the morality which Jesus preached and practised was of the most benevolent kind, adds that similar systems had been preached by Confucius and some of the Greek philosophers many years before*; by which he evidently insinuates that Christ is to be ranked no higher than these philosophers in any respect. My object at present is not however to prove the superiority of Christ, but to shew that the light of nature did not enable them to form perfect systems. Amongst the heathen philosophers Socrates is generally supposed to have been the wisest and best; and according to the accounts we have of him, he was certainly an excellent character. He lived to the age of seventy, in the most flourishing period with respect to arts and sciences, of the most distinguished city of Greece, a country so far exceeding the rest of the world in civilization, as to regard them as barbarians. He enjoyed perfect leisure for prosecuting any studies he engaged in, and seems to have spent almost his whole life in acquiring and communicating knowledge. Here then was a man every way qualified for making those great discoveries by reason alone, were it possible to make them: and though he never published any thing himself,

we have copious accounts of his opinions in the writings of his eminent disciples Xenophon and Plato. Now it appears that Socrates conformed himself, and advised his followers to conform to the worship of those Gods, which the state acknowledged, and that he frequently sacrificed to them in public, from which we may fairly infer that Socrates, with all his wisdom, was unable to discover the absurdity of polytheism, although he pointed out many abuses; for I am not willing to believe that so good a moralist would be guilty of *mental lying*, and even in the moment of dissolution would appoint a sacrifice which he deemed entirely unnecessary. Socrates seems likewise to have been a believer in oracles and divination, of which he made great use; and so far was he from thinking natural philosophy the best guide to true religion, that he seems rather to have discouraged it, and to have considered it as above the reach of human reason. Socrates was the first Greek philosopher who applied himself principally to morals, and he excelled both in precepts and practice all who succeeded him. Yet excellent as his morality was upon the whole, the practice of common swearing in which he indulged, argued a want of proper reverence for God, whilst his speaking of the *barbarians*, that is, all other nations, as natural enemies to the Greeks, with whom they should be continually at war, and whom they might therefore reduce to slavery, waste their fields, or burn their houses, is not easily reconcilable to humanity. Respecting a future state, this great man seems to have been in much uncertainty, and the arguments he advances to prove it are very weak and inconclusive. Of the Greek philosophers in general, none of whom seem to have been equal to Socrates in wisdom or virtue, it may be observed, that though the greater part acknowledged one supreme God, they taught at the same time, and with the same sincerity, the worship of many subordinate deities, some of whom were of the most wicked and immoral characters. The homage due to the supreme Being, was intercepted by their attention to the variety of sacrifices appointed to be performed to these false and imaginary deities: and their conceptions of God were either so erroneous or unsettled, that they could not have any effect in promoting virtuous practice, or administering consolation in the seasons of distress, or in the hour of death. It is but just however to own, that the writings of the philosophers contain many excellent truths, fine sentiments, and precepts both of the moral and devout kind. It was to be regretted that there was no method of propa-

ting these instructions among the people, though perhaps they would have had little influence upon minds engrossed, darkened, and corrupted with the lowest, and most abominable superstitions. It may indeed be doubted, whether even men of learning and education, were able to protect themselves from the corrupting influence of the low and immoral characters of the Gods, whom they thought themselves bound to worship.—Confucius, the famous Chinese philosopher, has been particularly mentioned by Mr. Paine. Though I have often heard him and his followers highly extolled, yet I considered our sources of information on the subject so imperfect, that I acknowledge, I never enquired into his character till I undertook these Letters. It has been long the practice of infidels to bring up the Chinese in one form or other, though it does not appear that they are more wise or virtuous than other nations who have had similar advantages. They have improved much in the arts and sciences, considering their situation, but they fall far short of Europeans. Their philosophy has many absurdities, and their morality seems very indifferent both in theory and practice: so little benefit have they reaped from the labours and precepts of Confucius. Most of what we know concerning this philosopher, who like Socrates, devoted his principal attention to morals, is calculated to raise him in our esteem; but there seems to have been an austerity in his precepts, which places him below that teacher, *whose yoke was easy and his burden light*. With respect to Religion, he appears to have believed in the superstitious opinions of his countrymen; and I cannot find that he had any notion of a future state, which it seems his followers expressly deny. From the idea Mr. Paine's works have given me, of the little knowledge he has acquired by *reading*, I am inclined to think that in mentioning Confucius, he did it without a previous enquiry into his character and principles. I am the more induced to think so, from a circumstance recorded of him by Dr. Leland,* which he takes from an author much prejudiced in his favour. "Confucius," he says, "blamed those who did not worship according to the accustomed rites, but were ambitious to sacrifice to a higher kind of spirits than their condition allowed. For, according to the Chinese laws, none but the Emperor was to offer sacrifices with solemn rites

* In his work entitled *The advantage and necessity of the Christian Revelation*, from which, and Dr. Leechman's Sermon on the wisdom of God, many observations in this letter have been taken.

“rites to heaven and to the earth. The tributary Kings and
 “Princes, who were next in dignity to the Emperor, were
 “allowed to sacrifice to the mountains and rivers, or to their
 “spirits: the inferior governors to inferior things; and so
 “on: every one was to offer sacrifices according to the rank
 “of the offerer and the spirits to which he sacrificed. Con-
 “fucius was for having this order strictly observed; from
 “whence it is evident, that he considered religion chiefly
 “in a political view.” You will perhaps be surprised on
 reading this, to find Confucius so extolled by the *author of*
the Rights of Man, the avowed champion of liberty and
 equality, and so should I, could I imagine he was more ac-
 quainted with that philosopher and his opinions, than the most
 ignorant person who may chance to read these Letters:—
 Christ certainly teaches no such distinction in worship, nor is
 there any sect of Christians, I know of, which forbids the
 king and the beggar to pay their homage to the same God who is
 over all, and who is no respecter of persons. To Confucius and
 the Greek philosophers, whose systems equalled that of Christ,
 Mr. Paine has added the Quakers, a compliment for which,
 I imagine, that respectable body will not be much obliged to
 him: since, though Mr. Paine may be ignorant of it, they
 have ever acknowledged Christ as their master, and profess to
 have derived their system, from what is represented as taught
 by him, in the New Testament.* From the very cursory view
 I have taken of the subject, it will I hope, appear to you, that
 the light of nature was not of itself sufficient to prevent men
 who had every natural advantage, from falling into egregious
 errors respecting the nature of the supreme Being, and the
 duties of man, and, that it was not able to teach them, the
 certainty, if even, the strong probability of a future state of
 existence, though this latter Mr. Paine does not seem to think
 of much importance. Erroneous however as were the opinions,
 and imperfect as was the practice of the philosophers, very
 few of whom deserve to be classed with Socrates and Confucius,
 the people in general were still more ignorant and vicious, and
 the religious principles they had, instead of restraining their
 passions, furnished the most powerful motives to the practice
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* “To say the morality of the Quakers, is very like the morality
 “of the gospel is, as if a man were to make the observation, that the
 “English was a fine language, and that what they spoke in Yorkshire
 “bore a wonderful resemblance to it.” *Critical Review* for Sept.

of vice. There was not a crime which can disgrace human nature, which was not attributed to some or other of their Gods, and their practice was often considered as an excuse, and even as an example for their worshippers. From the length of time in which the wisest and most polished nations continued in this state of ignorance and corruption, it was manifest that natural means were not sufficient to enlighten their minds, and reform their conduct. These had been long tried without effect. For while arts and sciences were cultivated, and brought to a considerable degree of perfection, religious notions, and religious rites became if possible more absurd. To the worship of the heavenly bodies, the polished Egyptians and Greeks added that of dead men. And how deplorable, in a moral respect, is the state of those parts of the world to which the knowledge of Christianity has not reached, or in which its glorious and salutary light is extinguished. If then *the world by its own wisdom knew not God*, if men did not make a right use of their reason, nor were sufficiently apprized of all the consequences of their conduct, and if they wanted stronger motives than would ever occur to themselves to the practice of universal virtue—in these circumstances was it not highly expedient, that the great parent and friend of mankind should interpose to apprise them of these consequences, that he should send proper persons duly authorised to engage their attention, and thus to inform their judgment, interest their affections, and direct their conduct? Considering the benevolence of the supreme Being, may we not say that it was not only expedient, but highly probable, that he would assist his creatures, and enable them to become more virtuous and happy? Another circumstance which I would urge to you, and which I have already hinted at in a former letter, is, that had our religious and moral knowledge been derived from the light of nature alone, it would have gradually improved, whereas it manifestly degenerated. Some of the oldest and best philosophers, acknowledge that they did not *discover* their most important doctrines, but received them from ancient tradition. These first sages who were not so puffed up with conceited notions of the power of their own reason, as to reject all traditionary opinions and *hearsay evidence*, spoke frequently more justly and more worthily of the Deity and Providence, and with less hesitation of a future state, than their successors, whose pride of understanding made them depend on their own reasoning. To this it may be added, that Confucius acknowledged having received his system, from philosophers

sophers who lived several hundred years before his time, and this was the case with Zoroaster and other ancient sages. From these circumstances may we not infer, that the best knowledge the ancient philosophers had, was derived by tradition, from some former revelation made by God to mankind. How else could the knowledge of morals have made such a progress in the world, at a period when philosophy and science were very little known? Or how else could it happen, that as these were improved by the light of reason, the other should have so manifestly declined? How otherwise can it be accounted for, that the Jews in other respects so unenlightened, should in the knowledge of the Deity, and in a moral system have so far excelled more polished nations? Mr. Paine supposes the *starry Heavens* would teach such things, why then did they not do so? Why as men became more acquainted with them and nature in general, did they degenerate in religious knowledge? Or by what means has it happened that this word of God, so visible to all and so easily read, has not better instructed those who are still in idolatry, and have not had their understandings perverted, or *their genius killed* by the nipping blasts of Christian schools? Their *learning is not cut down to the narrow sphere of linguistry*, and yet with equal natural powers, we do not find that their philosophy or religion is to be compared with that of Christians, though the system of the latter, *however we may blame the Goths and Vandals*, Mr. Paine says, has been the cause of all the ignorance which was in the world since its propagation. And it is probable that Mr. Paine himself, great and unconfined as the powers of his mind undoubtedly are, is indebted for more of the knowledge in astronomy and mechanicks, which he has so pompously displayed, to the *lectures of Messrs. Martin and Ferguson*, and the *acquaintance of Dr. Bewis*, than to his own deductions from the works of Creation. Whether or not, Christian philosophers whose works shew they have thought much of both, and who certainly were not deficient in reasoning powers, have believed both the Christian Revelation, and the noble system of philosophy of which Mr. Paine speaks. The great Newton who did so much to establish it, never thought that his belief in a plurality of worlds, rendered the Christian system of faith *both little and ridiculous*, nor was it *scattered in his mind like feathers in the air*. Whatever he might think of *particular doctrines*, he was not so rash as to reject Christianity, merely because it appeared to have been abused and corrupted. But to return from this digression, I would mention further,

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× that many of the ancient philosophers were not insensible of the darkness in which they were involved, and expressed in strong terms the sense they had of the uncertainty of their own reasonings and of their need of a better guide; and Socrates in particular said, that *there was no hope of amending men's morals unless God should be pleased to send some other person to instruct them.* It seems then to have been the fact, that no sect of philosophers had attained any thing like a full conviction concerning the unity, attributes, and moral government of God; that they had very imperfect ideas of the just extent of moral virtue, and that the knowledge they had of a future state added little or no strength to its obligations; that the practice of the gentile world was such as might be expected from the general corruption of their moral and religious principles; that instead of amending, they evidently degenerated notwithstanding the improvement of science; that their best moral precepts were derived from tradition, and not from their own reasoning, which affords a presumption that Revelation was the source of them; and that the wisest and best Heathens had noticed the want of a divine illumination. I hope, that even in the short view I have taken of them, enough has been said to establish these points, and to satisfy you that such being the circumstances of the world, a divine interposition was expedient as it would be so seasonable and advantageous. “ We may almost say (observes “ Dr. Priestly *) that it became the great and good parent “ of the human race, to afford his creatures and offspring that “ assistance which in their situation they so much wanted, and “ which they were not capable of procuring for themselves.”

* There are many passages in these letters taken from the writings of this distinguished man, in defence of Revelation; a man whose excellent moral character and most comprehensive genius must entitle him to respect, from all who cultivate science and truth, however they may differ from him on subjects of a speculative nature, which in this land of liberty are open to free discussion.

LETTER

LETTER V.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

IT is one of the great objects of Mr. Paine's work, to show that reason alone is sufficient to teach us all that is necessary for us to know, and consequently that there was no occasion for any farther revelation. In the two last letters I have endeavoured to establish both by argument and facts, that men were not able by reason alone, to acquire just ideas of God and their duty. It is true that Mr. Paine has given us some noble ideas of the supreme Being, and that he justly infers from them some excellent moral virtues; but you are not to forget that Mr. Paine was educated a Christian, and that there is a very great difference between perceiving the reasonableness of what is proposed, and originally discovering it. And even supposing Mr. Paine had originally discovered these perfections of God and the deductions from them, it would not follow that every one of you could, for however deficient he may be in learning and knowledge of his subject, very few are superior to him in ability. But I am making an unnecessary digression. I have already adduced facts (and facts are stubborn things) to prove that the unassisted reason of man, was not able to make such discoveries previous to the appearance of Christ, and it would be absurd therefore to suppose it could now. And such being the state of the world, idolatry and wickedness prevailing amongst all nations, was it not to be expected that an infinitely powerful and benevolent Being, as Mr. Paine acknowledges God to be, should assist his creatures by giving them that information of which they were so much in need? Now there are certain books handed down to us, professing to contain a history of one Jesus Christ, who assumed the character of a divine teacher; which books are said to have been written by his disciples, and contain the doctrines which he is said to have taught, and the precepts he is said to have delivered, and there are certain other books of greater antiquity, which besides much historical information, contain a previous revelation said to have been delivered by God, through one Moses and others, to the Jews. As many objections have been raised to these books, it may be necessary to enquire, whether the general system they contain is unworthy of God, considered as a wise and benevolent

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Being.

Being. You will, I fear, think me long in coming to the principal question ; but the subject is of so much importance, and such great pains have been taken to prejudice you against Christianity, that I am anxious to remove every objection, before I proceed to establish it by testimony. I would first observe, that the books in question give us ideas of God, suitable to the light of nature, and much superior to what had been discovered by it at the time of their publication. A heavy charge has indeed been brought against them in this respect. Mr. Paine says, *Do we want to know what God is ? Search not the book called the scripture which any human hand might make, but the scripture called the creation.* Does not this passage imply, that the much abused writings called scripture, do not give any just notions of the supreme Being ? Lest however you should misunderstand him, he tells you soon after, that *a few chapters in Job and the nineteenth Psalm,* are almost the only parts in the book called the bible, that convey to us any idea of God, which books are true deistical compositions, for they treat of the Deity through his works.* And as he seems not to know, that the New Testament bears the same relation to the bible, which a part does to the whole, he tells you again, that he *recollects not a single passage in all the writings ascribed to the men called apostles, that conveys any idea of what God is.* These are strong assertions, and with a man who has never read the bible, and believes Mr. Paine to be well acquainted with it, they may have weight. Those however who have read the book in question, will imagine his memory to be a very bad one, and will perhaps think it strange, that he should say so much against a book of which he knows so little, and which he wanted either power or inclination to consult.† Such of you, being satisfied of the falsity of Mr. Paine's

* Mr. Paine mentions the 19th Psalm as *deistical*, that is, teaching the perfections of God from his works only, and therefore I suppose unfavourable to the notion of a revealed will of God. Had we not had sufficient proof of his complete ignorance of scripture, this would have furnished an instance of it, for though the first six verses paraphrased by Mr. Addison, and through his means, known to Mr. Paine, speak of the creation ; the remainder of the Psalm is supposed, and I think with reason to refer to a written law of God, with which the writer was acquainted, and the excellency of which he had experienced.

† " It is indeed the extreme of arrogance, to write against books, which, to put them in the lowest point of view, are respectable for their antiquity ; interesting from the traces they afford of history and manners, far hidden within the obscurity of remote periods ; admirable

Paine's assertion, may think any further notice of it unnecessary ; but it is not impossible, that curiosity may lead some to look over these letters, who are too wise to read *such trash* as is contained in the bible, and I have not the vanity to suppose that the assertion of a teacher of Christianity, who is of course thought interested to support the *pious fraud*, would have any weight with them, against that of such a man as Mr. Paine. I proceed therefore to prove, that the scriptures do convey some idea of God, and I shall particularly notice those ideas which Mr. Paine himself has mentioned. *I believe*, says he, *in one God and no more*. He gives us no reason for this belief, and it is a truth, which all the wisdom of Grecian antiquity was unable clearly to discover. What then did Moses teach ? *Hear O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord*. Deut. vi. 4. What does the Evangelist tell us that Christ taught ? *And Jesus answered him, the first of all the commandments is, hear O Israel the Lord our God is one Lord, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength*. Mark, xii. 29, 30. I forbear quoting other passages, though many occur, because these sufficiently shew that Moses and Christ taught that God is one, which I humbly conceive gives us *some idea* of him. Mr. Paine infers that God was the first cause of all things, and has existed from all eternity. The scripture says, *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*. Gen. i. *The Lord is the true God and everlasting King. He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion*. Jerem. x. 10. &c. And St. Paul, that *manufacturer of quibbles*,* as Mr. Paine stiles him, says, *We preach unto you, that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, who made the*

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heaven

" rable for their beauty and sublimity, inestimable for the treasures
 " of moral precept, and fervent effusions of piety, which they contain ;
 " a very storehouse, and magazine, whence, through so many centuries, the devout heart has ever drawn its brightest ideas, and clothed its aspirations in the most animated language—to write, we say,
 " against books, whose claims to our attention are so numerous, and
 " not to think it necessary to consult, in order to confute them." *Critical Review*, for September 1794.

* It might have been expected, that the great eloquence and abilities of this distinguished character, so evident in all his writings, and particularly in his speech to King Agrippa, would have procured for him more respectful mention.

heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein. Acts, xiv. 15. The Greeks by their wisdom, had never discovered that God was the first cause and creator of all things; they thought the creation of equal age with their Gods; but the same St. Paul had more rational notions, and gives a most noble idea of the supreme Being, in his address to the Athenians; *God that made the world, and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshiped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.* Acts xvii. 24. &c. And in the ninetyeth Psalm, Moses, the supposed author, addressing God, says, *Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God.* Mr. Paine says, *Do we want to contemplate his power? We see it in the immensity of the Creation.* Scripture gives us the same idea, and describes it by a reference to his works. He is the *possessor of heaven and earth*, and all things which they contain, who preserveth them all, and by whose ordinances the hosts of heaven regulate all their motions. *Do we want* says Mr. Paine, *to contemplate his wisdom? We see it in the unchangeable order, by which the incomprehensible whole is governed.* We learn the same from the scripture, and to enable us to conceive what is meant by his wisdom, he is described as *wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.* And as a striking and poetical description both of his power and wisdom inferred from his works, I will recommend to you the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, beginning at the 12th verse; * for though Mr. Paine in his prison at Paris, might be unable to procure a bible, none of you can lie under a similar disadvantage, since if you are without that useful book yourselves, some of your acquaintance will be able to supply you. Another attribute mentioned by Mr. Paine, is munificence, and he infers it from the *abundance with which God fills the earth.* You will remember that the scripture ascribes to him the same perfection.

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* It may be proper to observe, as there are different translations of the bible, that the references I have made, are equally applicable to the Doway and common version. They, and every other, I have had an opportunity of perusing, agree in the main, though they differ materially in a few passages.

The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works. The earth is full of the goodness of God. The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing. Psalm cxlv, 9, 15. And in the writings of the Apostles, we are taught that *God is love, and that every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.* James i. 17. Do we want to contemplate his mercy? says Mr. Paine, *We see it in his not withholding that abundance, even from the unthankful.* Here he seems to recollect what he might have read in his early years, for in the gospel of Matthew we find, that *God maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.* Matt. v. 45. The same perfections then, which Mr. Paine has mentioned as the deductions of reason, are also taught in the scripture, and he appears clearly convicted of having very rashly asserted what is not true, that the new Testament, and most of the old, convey to us no idea of God. I might shew you that there are many other perfections attributed to God in these books, which are agreeable to reason, and calculated to give us more noble conception of the great first cause, but I conceive that I have sufficiently established, that they give us ideas of God suitable to the light of nature, and superior to what had been discovered by it at the period of Christianity, even though we had not reason to ascribe much of what was known to a traditionary revelation. I would next observe that these scriptures contain an excellent system of morality. I did not observe any moral conclusion deduced by Mr. Paine, but one, and that is, I acknowledge, a very excellent one, benevolence. *From Gods munificence to all, men may learn to be kind to each other.* Christians are on the same ground ordered to pursue the same conduct. *The gloomy and controversial writings of the apostles which Mr. Paine seems chiefly to detest, give us frequent, plain, and most excellent precepts respecting brotherly love.* Our Saviour says, that the second great commandment of the law is, *thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, and by neighbour, he evidently means every man, of whatever nation, or party he be, who stands in need of our assistance, or with whom we have any connection.* And the apostle Paul says, Rom. xiii. 8. that *he that loveth another, hath fulfilled the law*; and we are urged to do this, because *God is love, and we ought to show ourselves the children of our Father, who is in heaven, who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just*

just and unjust. The scriptures then teach the same morality, as Mr. Paine would infer from the light of reason alone, and they also teach much more. They teach us, as we might expect in a revelation, from a wise and good being, that the chief thing which God requires of man is purity of heart, and integrity of life, or the genuine principles, the uniform practice, and the confirmed habits of all moral virtue; comprehending an unfeigned reverence and love of himself, the highest respect for his authority, and an humble and cheerful submission to all the dispensations of his providence, together with all the natural expressions of our dependance upon him, and obligation to him. They also teach, as we have seen, that he requires of us, a sincere regard to the welfare of our fellow creatures, and all those actions which naturally arise from that generous principle, namely, all the duties of justice, equity and humanity: and as we might farther expect from such a being, he interposes his authority in favour of those virtues, which more immediately respect ourselves, and the government of our appetites and passions, and commands us to be chaste and temperate, humble, meek, contented and diligent; no slaves to violent and unreasonable passions, or to any affection of mind, by which we might debase our natures, or expose ourselves to the temptation of disturbing and injuring others. Such is in few words the *morality* of the bible, and it is such as is perfectly agreeable to reason, consistent with the attributes of God, and calculated to promote our happiness in the world. I shall now add, that the scriptures not only contain a most excellent system of morality, but are calculated to inforce it by precepts, and point out the way of improving in, and adhering to it. The morality taught in the bible is conveyed in plain rules of conduct, and authoritative denunciations, which experience *has shown to have more effect* in making men really virtuous, than the speculations of reason and philosophy. These precepts too are plain to the meanest capacity, and may be understood by children at a very early age. We are also taught how to improve in, and adhere to virtue. For this purpose, the sacred writings, propose constant watchfulness, frequent meditation on the works and word of God, a careful choice of good company, and great resolution, and self-denial, whenever bad habits are become predominant. They moreover advise all persons to watch over one another, and to do every thing to mutual edification. I may add, that they appoint several observances, which are not in themselves of a moral nature, but which ultimately tend to promote good morals,

morals, and that just state of mind, which makes the practice of our duty in other respects easy to us. Finally, the sacred writings afford the most strong inducements to act well. They teach us that God is perfectly acquainted with all our thoughts and actions, and that the virtuous are objects of his favour, whilst the wicked are an offence to him. They appeal to our gratitude, by urging us to shew the sense we have of God's favours, by obedience to his reasonable commandment. They hold out to our view, the dignity of our nature, as beings created in the image of God, and endowed with reasoning powers, which exalt us far above the brute creatures around us, and they call upon us to act, as becomes the children of God—but above all, they confirm if they did not originally discover the doctrine of a future state, in which those who have done evil, must expect punishment, whilst those who have done good, shall be exalted to glory, honour and immortality. And “ how different, how superior a being must this view “ properly impressed on the mind, make a man! It is a difference not easy to describe, but it may be felt. A being “ of a day will have his views, thoughts and schemes adapted “ to a day. To-morrow cannot interest him, because he has “ no interest in it. If he like the scenes of the day, to which “ his existence is confined, his heart must sicken at the idea “ of any thing beyond it, because he is totally excluded from “ it. What then must be the feelings of the man, who truly “ and habitually believes, that he is born for eternity; that “ years and ages bear no sensible proportion to the term of his “ existence; that the duration of the sun, moon, and stars, “ is no more than a period that divides his existence, and “ assists him in measuring it; that when they shall be no more “ he only as it were begins to be, and that other suns, and “ other worlds, will be equally short-lived with respect to “ him. How sublime and how animating is the thought! Can “ any thing mean and sordid occupy the breast of a being, “ who is persuaded of this grand destination? Will he not “ overlook every thing temporary, and be ever stretching “ his thoughts to things eternal, in which his interest is infinitely greater than in any thing here?” * And does Mr. Paine believe in this doctrine, so favourable to virtue? *He hopes for happiness beyond this life, and believing the power of God to continue his existence, he thinks it more probable that he shall continue to exist hereafter, than that he should have had existence before*

before that existence began. On what this probability is founded, he leaves his reader to imagine, for he does not give a single argument, in support of it, nor lay any stress upon it as a doctrine of importance. Enough may appear to awaken a desire, but there is a slender foundation for a lively hope of immortality, and a firm conviction of a state of reward and punishment, which alone will have much effect on the minds of men in general. "That kind of light," to use the words of the late excellent Dr. Leechman, "is too weak and too dubious to be of any great service to the vulgar sight, which every passing cloud conceals even from the philosophick eye. The philosopher while warmed with his own reasoning, and while at ease and in health, may exult in the pleasing theory of immortal happiness—but this theory is in great danger of failing him, when he stands most in need of its consolation and support. Whereas the faith of a Christian, if it be really well founded, is a fixed and steady light, flowing from the declarations of him who came to bear witness to the truth, and who assured us that he was himself the resurrection and the life, and that he who believeth on him, though he were dead yet should he live—and it is a light that never deserts him, but on the contrary, shines brightest in the darkest season of distress." Mr. Paine's reasons for hope, if he had declared them, would probably be obscure, but the declarations of Christianity are so clear and convincing, that they afford equal benefit to the philosopher, and the illiterate peasant. And can you avoid feeling a desire of the truth of such a doctrine as this? Will you readily and without very sufficient grounds, give up your firm conviction of it, as founded on the declarations of Christ, recorded in the scriptures? Will you willingly resign your greatest consolation in the hour of distress, or in the evening of life? I trust not. Imagine not however that I call upon you to believe in revelation, for the reasons I have now been urging—I have only wished to remove some of the prejudices, which Mr. Paine may have occasioned against it. No: the evidences of the gospel of Christ, rest upon a much stronger foundation, they are built upon an immoveable rock, and I have no doubt, however circumstances may occasion the progress of infidelity for a season, that the more Christianity is discussed, the more its evidences are enquired into, the firmer will be our conviction of its truth. At present, what I desire is, that the noble ideas which revelation gives us of God, so consistent with what we infer from reason; the excellent system of morality it teaches; the instructions it gives for improvement

provement in virtue, and the strong inducements it holds out to act well, particularly by the prospect of a future state of retribution; I am desirous, I say, that these things may abate your prejudices if you have any, and dispose you to attend to the arguments which I shall lay before you.

E LETTER

LETTER VI.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

THAT in the circumstances of the world at the time of the first preaching of Christianity, some revelation from God was *expedient*, and considering his goodness, even *probable*, and that what has been handed down to us as a revelation from God, is such as might be expected from him, being calculated to render men virtuous and happy, are points which I hope have been satisfactorily established; there are however some objections made by Mr. Paine, which strike at the very root of revealed religion, by, in a manner, denying the possibility of it. As I know these objections have made an impression upon the minds of some amongst you, I shall briefly consider them in this letter. One of these objections is founded on the establishments of different churches or religions in different places, all of which consider themselves as in the right, and accuse those of other persuasions of unbelief: he particularly instances the Jewish, the Christian, and the Mahometan churches, *each of which established itself by pretending some special commission from God, communicated to certain individuals, and each of which shews certain books which they call revelation, or the word of God*; all of which he therefore rejects. In reply to this, I would observe, that it does not follow, because all these churches cannot be true that therefore none can, and that the proper way is to examine the evidence which each produces in support of its divine original, and then to determine which of them has claim to our belief, or whether all ought to be rejected. To pass judgment against any, merely because it has been established, and even perverted to a *monopoly of power and profit*, has more the appearance of prejudice, than of the calm determination of unbiassed *reason*. The impropriety of passing judgment in this manner, will appear still greater when it is considered, that the great founder of Christianity did not himself set up a *religion of pomp and revenue*, but positively declared that his *kingdom was not of this world*; that his disciples were men of an humble station in life, and that for three hundred years his religion was not established, but the professors of it were objects of reproach and persecution; that since Christianity has been established in many countries, there have been different sects, which on account of not adopting the national faith, have been shut out from a participation of the emoluments annexed to it, and yet have continued zealously attached to

to the common cause; that some of these, as the Quakers, have even excluded every appearance of a priesthood and interested teachers, whilst others are adverse to every kind of religious establishment; and that, if prejudice will rank the clergy of all denominations and their hearers as knaves or fools, still that religion which was adopted on enquiry by Bacon, Newton, Locke, and others, the most distinguished names in every kind of science, who could have had no motive but the love of truth, that religion I say, should not be rejected merely because statesmen, whether properly or not, have allied it to the civil power.* Mr. Paine's objections taken from peculiar doctrines held by different sects of Christians, and from the persecutions and wars which Christianity has given rise to, is equally weak; for how unjust and even absurd is it to charge this religion, with all the opinions its professors have adopted, and the faults they have committed, without attempting to shew that such opinions, and such conduct were the necessary or natural consequence of its promulgation, and particularly when there are Christians who disclaim them. To say the most, such objections are only, what are usually called *argumenta ad homines*, arguments which apply to the sects or persons, who have held such opinions and pursued such conduct, and as Mr. Paine could not possibly be ignorant, that they were thought by many to have no foundation in the bible, it shews a great degree of unfairness in him, to make the use of them he has done, and I cannot help thinking, gives reason to suspect that he is not *so mentally faithful to himself*, as he would wish us to believe.

Another of Mr. Paine's objections to Christianity, is its want of universality, *that the way to God is not open to every man alike*. This appears at first sight, to have more weight than it really has. If a divine revelation, it is said, be necessary to the happiness of some, it is to that of all; now a powerful, wise, and good Being, as God is, would have made all

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partakers

* It will be observed by some, that I have abstained as much as possible, from giving my own opinion on controverted matters, and it may perhaps be attributed to an improper compliance with the sentiments of others. My motive for pursuing this mode, has been already mentioned in the introductory letter, and it appears to me a very sufficient one. To the religious sentiments I have adopted I am firmly attached, and as I am too sensible of their importance to be ashamed of them, I am ready on every proper occasion to avow them, and give my reasons for adopting them.

partakers of it, therefore it cannot be needful to any. But if this reasoning is true, it would follow that neither is *natural religion*, or that which we derive by the aid of our reasoning powers, necessary to answer the ends of our creation, for notwithstanding what Mr. Paine says of its universality, experience has fully shown that it is not universal. All men have not leisure or abilities to discover the truths of it, and therefore there is no occasion even for it:—a conclusion which would overturn Mr. Paine's deistical system, and completely destroy all moral obligation. The whole force of this objection to Christianity from the want of universality, is derived from a position respecting the moral attributes of God, that he deals with all his creatures in an equally favourable manner, a supposition which appears upon the most transient view of things, to be utterly false. Witness the condition of those, who inhabit countries situated in very high northern and southern latitudes, or in the parched deserts of Africa, compared with that of those dwelling in the more temperate parts of the globe. There are differences of all degrees at present, in respect of all the good things which God has given us to enjoy; and therefore, may be in the best of all good things, revealed religion. Were a person to object to the goodness of God, because the worm which crawls on the ground, has not powers equal to his own, he would be thought very unreasonable, since the worm and all other creatures have powers suited to their respective states, which is a strong proof of wise design, and benevolent execution. Were a man to refuse to make use of the powers with which he is gifted, or to enjoy the favourable circumstances in which he is placed, because the powers of others are not equal, or their circumstances unfavourable, he would probably be regarded as a madman:—yet exactly similar is the conduct of him, who enjoying the light of Christianity rejects the benefit, because there are others who do not partake of it. The want of universality indeed furnishes an argument in favour of Christianity, by its being perfectly analogous to the course of nature. And it is reasonable to suppose, that the same wise and good principle which disposed the author of nature to make different kinds and orders of creatures, also disposed him to place creatures of like kinds in different situations, and that the same principle which disposed him to make different creatures of different moral capacities, also disposed him to place creatures of like moral capacities, in different religious situations, and even the same creatures, in different periods of their being. “Nor is there
“any thing shocking in this difference amongst men, with
“respect

“ respect to religious advantages, or which would seem to
 “ bear hard upon the moral administration in nature, if we
 “ would really keep in mind that every one shall be dealt equi-
 “ tably with. All shadow of injustice, and indeed all harsh
 “ appearances, in this various economy of providence would
 “ be lost, if we would keep in mind that every merciful al-
 “ lowance shall be made, and no more be required of any one
 “ than what might have been equitably expected of him,
 “ from the circumstances in which he was placed; and not
 “ what might have been expected had he been placed in other
 “ circumstances: *i. e.* in scripture language, *that every*
 “ *man shall be accepted according to what he had, not according*
 “ *to what he had not.*” 2 Cor. viii. 12.* An objection of a
 similar kind, is, that respecting language; *the continually pro-*
gressive change to which the meaning of words is subject, the
want of an universal language, which renders translations neces-
sary, the errors to which translators are again subject, the mis-
takes of copyists and printers, together with the possibility of
wilful alteration, are of themselves evidences that human lan-
guage, whether in speech or in print cannot be the vehicle of the
word of God. This objection is founded upon the supposi-
 tion that God will not adopt any mode of communication;
 but the most perfect one, and that we are able to judge
 which is most perfect. If God see fit to make use of lan-
 guage as the vehicle of his communications to men, shall
 man reject them, because he imagines that a better way
 might have been adopted? Shall we presume to dictate to
 our Creator, and say, either instruct me in my duty in such
 a manner as will require no pains on my part to discover thy
 will, or else leave me to myself? There may be reasons
 we cannot comprehend, which might induce the supreme
 Being, to throw some difficulties in our way, and if we
 have evidence of the genuineness of the books, it would be
 absurd to reject them, because language is liable to imperfec-
 tions. Besides greater stress is laid upon these imperfections
 than they deserve. No man in his senses would reject any of
 the ancient Greek or Latin writers, and consider his works as of
 no use, on account of them, and yet there is not one of them,
 but is far more uncertain than the scriptures are, because
 there are fewer ancient copies of them, and a greater number of

* Bishop Butler's *analogy of religion*, p. 320, from which, and Dr.
 Hartley on *man*, the above arguments are chiefly taken.

of variations in proportion to the quantity; and the number of copies which have been compared. Nevertheless we are able, or imagine ourselves able to discover the general purport of their writings, and we give credit to their testimony; and even Mr. Paine himself, sceptical as he is, seems to entertain no doubt of the general propriety of the translations of them, from which he thinks much useful knowledge may be derived. Now if we can attain a competent knowledge of other ancient writings, why may we not also of the bible, and if we be able to learn the contents of God's revelations by natural means, and the usual mode of communication from one man to another, why should we expect God to work a continual miracle to inform us of them? Never were books handed down from ancient times so well authenticated as they have been, and shall we reject them, because we see that language has its imperfections? But you may say, though men of learning are able by their knowledge of the ancient languages, and the time they have for investigation, to ascertain the faithfulness of a translation, and find out the meaning of scripture, how are the poor and illiterate to judge of the fidelity of a translation, and to know whether they are imposed upon or not? This question is often put, and with apparent dissatisfaction; but might it not as well be asked, how comes it that there are any poor and illiterate at all? Why is not every man in circumstances to arrive at an equal degree of knowledge with his neighbour? I can only say, so it has seemed good to the allwise disposer of events, and therefore we cannot reasonably doubt that it will finally be productive of good. In the mean time, such persons may attain sufficient knowledge for their state, by information from men of learning and integrity, and by observing that persons who differ most widely in their sentiments, and are competent judges, agree in admitting the general fidelity of a translation, though they may differ about a few passages; and it is a circumstance much in their favour, that all the different translations agree in the most material points, those which relate to moral conduct, and the necessity of acting well in this world, that we may attain happiness in the next. Man without diligent search cannot attain an adequate knowledge of many of the most ordinary operations of art; and still more industry is necessary to penetrate those of nature. We cannot therefore expect to find revelation free from all difficulties, and we are exhorted to *seek*, with a promise *that we shall find*. This necessity for search, is probably of the greatest use to us; but Mr. Paine would needs have *ignorance to be the mother of devotion*, and the religion of the illiterate, the effect of inspiration!

The

The following passage from Archdeacon Paley's late work, on the evidences of Christianity, will confirm and illustrate the reasoning made use of, in answer to the two last objections and to some others. "Of a revelation which came from God, the proof, it has been said, would in all ages be so publick and manifest, that no part of the human species would remain ignorant of it, no understanding could fail of being convinced by it. The advocates of Christianity do not pretend, that the evidence of their religion possesses these qualities. They do not deny, that we can conceive it to be within the compass of divine power, to have communicated to the world a higher degree of assurance, and to have given to his communication a stronger and more extensive influence. For any thing we are able to discern, God *could* have so formed men, as to have perceived the truths of religion intuitively; or to have carried on a communication with the other world, whilst they lived in this; or to have seen the individuals of the species, instead of dying, pass to heaven by a sensible translation. He could have presented a separate miracle to each man's senses. He could have established a standing miracle. He could have caused miracles to be wrought in every different age and country. These, and many more methods which we may imagine, if we once give loose to our imaginations, are, so far as we can judge, all practicable. The question therefore is not, whether Christianity possesses the highest possible degree of evidence, but whether the not having more evidence, be a sufficient reason for rejecting that which we have. Now there appears to be no fairer method of judging, concerning any dispensation which is alledged to come from God, when a question is made whether such dispensation could come from God or not, than by comparing it with other things, which are acknowledged to proceed from the same council, and to be produced by the same agency. If the dispensation in question, labour under no other defects than what apparently belong to other dispensations, these seeming defects do not justify us, in setting aside the proofs which are offered of its authenticity, if they be otherwise entitled to credit. Throughout that order, then, of nature, of which God is the author, what we find is a system of *beneficence*, but we are seldom or ever able to make out a system of *optimism*. I mean that there are few cases in which, if we permit ourselves to range in possibilities, we cannot suppose something more perfect,

“ perfect, and more unobjectionable, than what we see. The
 “ rain which descends from heaven, is confessedly amongst
 “ the contrivances of the Creator, for the sustentation of the
 “ animals, and vegetables which subsist upon the surface of
 “ the earth. Yet how partially and irregularly is it supplied?
 “ How much of it falls upon the sea where it can be of no
 “ use, how often is it wanted when it would be of the great-
 “ est? What tracts of continent are rendered deserts by the
 “ scarcity of it? Or not to speak of extreme cases, how
 “ much, sometimes, do inhabited countries suffer by its de-
 “ ficiency or delay? We could imagine, if to imagine were
 “ our business, the matter to be otherwise regulated. We
 “ could imagine showers to fall, just where and when they
 “ would do good; always seasonable, every where sufficient,
 “ so distributed as not to leave a field upon the face of the
 “ globe scorched by drought, or even a plant withering for
 “ the lack of moisture. Yet does the difference between the
 “ real case and the imagined case, or the seeming inferiority
 “ of the one to the other, authorise us to say, that the pre-
 “ sent disposition of the atmosphere is not amongst the pro-
 “ ductions, or the designs of the Deity? Does it check the
 “ inference which we draw from the confessed beneficence of
 “ the provision? or does it make us cease to admire the con-
 “ trivance?—The observation which we have exemplified in
 “ the single instance of the rain of heaven, may be repeated
 “ concerning most of the appearances of nature: and the true
 “ conclusion to which it leads is this, that to enquire what the
 “ Deity might have done, could have done, or as we some-
 “ times presume to speak, ought to have done, and to build
 “ any propositions upon such enquiries against evidence of facts,
 “ is wholly unwarrantable. It is a mode of reasoning which will
 “ not do in natural history, which will not do in natural religion,
 “ which cannot therefore be applied with safety to revelation.
 “ It may have some foundation in certain speculative ideas of
 “ the divine attributes; but it has none in experience, or in
 “ analogy. The general character of the works of nature is,
 “ on the one hand, goodness both in design and effect; and
 “ on the other hand, a liability to difficulty, and to objections,
 “ if such objections be allowed, by reason of seeming incom-
 “ pleteness, or uncertainty in attaining their end. Christiani-
 “ tity participates of this character. The true similitude be-
 “ tween nature and revelation consists in this; that they each
 “ bear strong marks of their original; that they each also bear
 “ appearances of irregularity and defect. A system of strict
 “ optimism,

“ optimism, may nevertheless be the real system in both cases. But what I contend is, that the proof is hidden from
 “ us; that we ought not to expect to perceive that in revelation, which we hardly perceive in any thing; that beneficence of which we *can* judge, ought to satisfy us, that optimism, of which we cannot judge ought not to be sought after. We can judge of beneficence, because it depends upon
 “ effects which we experience, and upon the relation between the means which we see acting, and the ends which we see
 “ produced. We cannot judge of optimism, because it necessarily implies a comparison of that which is tried, with
 “ that which is not tried; of consequences which we see, with others which we imagine; and concerning many of which,
 “ it is more than probable we know nothing; concerning some that we have no notion.

“ If Christianity be compared with the state and progress of natural religion, the argument of the objectors will gain
 “ nothing by the comparison. I remember hearing an unbeliever say, that, if God had given a revelation, he would
 “ have written it in the skies. Are the truths of natural religion written in the skies, or in a language which every
 “ one reads? or is this the case with the most useful arts, or the most necessary sciences of human life? An Otaheitean
 “ or an Esquimaux knows nothing of Christianity; does he know more of the principles of deism or morality? which,
 “ notwithstanding his ignorance, are neither untrue, nor unimportant, nor uncertain. The existence of the Deity is
 “ left to be collected from observations, which every man does not make, which every man, perhaps, is not capable of
 “ making. Can it be argued, that God does not exist, because, if he did, he would let us see him, or discover
 “ himself to mankind by proofs, which no inadvertency could miss—no prejudice withstand?”

LETTER VII.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

HAVING now, I hope, sufficiently cleared the way for the discussion of the evidences of Christianity, it may be useful to enquire what kind of evidence we have of the truth of a revelation.* And here I would observe, that a revelation has three different stages; first, the *immediate* communication of it from God to the person whom he chooses to employ as his messenger: next, the communication of it by the person so receiving it to those to whom he is sent, and whom he has an opportunity of addressing; and lastly, the communication of it by verbal or written accounts to persons living in distant countries, or in future generations. The evidence of the first of these is *intuitive*, and brings the fullest conviction to the mind of the person receiving it, and certainly much stronger than any other can be. But, though so convincing to himself, it will not be so to others, nor will his bare assertion, that it is so, authorise belief. It is not impossible but he may pretend to such a communication without having actually received it; or a heated imagination may impose the dreams of his fancy upon him as realities. If God then designed to make any communication of his will to his creatures, and thought fit to employ a certain person as his instrument in doing so, we may reasonably conclude, that he would in some manner or other enable this person to prove that he was a divine messenger, and consequently, if it were antecedently probable that God would make such a revelation, it was also probable that he would use means to enforce attention to his messenger. What then, it may be asked, are the best means of confirming such a mission? This is a question I acknowledge myself unable to answer, for I have not the vanity to imagine, that by any chain of reasoning

* I have already had occasion to notice Mr. Paine's using the word *revelation* in a confined and unusual sense, whilst he seems to draw general conclusions respecting it, a circumstance which may occasion some confusion to his readers. Whether he meant this or not, I pretend not to decide, but one who has been so severe on the apostle Paul, for what he calls a *quibble* on the words *death* and *Adam*, and who has disrespectfully called Christianity, *a religion interlarded with quibble, subterfuge, and pun*, ought to have been more exact in the use of words than Mr. Paine appears to have been. Perhaps it is not a precept of Deism, to cast the beam out of our own eye, before we pull the mote out of a brother's eye.

ing *a priori*, I can discern what would be for the best, or decide that *any mode of evidence* is or is not *consistent*, or worthy the Almighty to make use of. It is the pride, perhaps I should call it the weakness of human reason, to say what God ought, or ought not to do. Reason is a most valuable gift, but let it not be misapplied; let us use it to judge of the truth of a revelation proposed to us, and of the sufficiency of the evidence; but let us not by *a priori* arguments undertake to judge the ways of the Almighty. Those persons by whom God is represented to have given the Jewish and Christian revelations, are said to have wrought miracles, and to have appealed to these miracles, and to the fulfilment of prophecies, as proofs that they were really commissioned by God. The communications which they are said to have made, and the account of these miracles which they wrought, have been handed down to our times by means of written records. It is our part to enquire whether these writings are to be depended upon. And if it should appear that they do contain an account of what Moses and Christ preached, and we have reason to believe that *they* were teachers sent from God, then these writings are to all intents and purposes a *divine revelation*, since they convey to us a discovery of what God taught by them, as well as a narration of the interesting facts which related to their ministry. But whether Moses and Christ really lived, and delivered what is ascribed to them; whether the books we have were really written by the persons who are said to have written them; and, whether these persons had proper means of information; whether in short, the facts recorded in them are true or false; these questions must be decided by testimony, which Mr. Paine invidiously calls *hearsay* evidence. But though the word *hearsay* is generally applied to things which deserve little credit, you will, I trust, be satisfied that the evidence of Christianity is the highest degree of *historical* evidence; and the man who applied the term *hearsay* to the account of the Norman conquest, or the assassination of Julius Cæsar, would be regarded as a sceptick whom no evidence could satisfy. There are then two distinct kinds of evidence to which we appeal, to miracles, and prophecy, in proof of the divine commission of an inspired teacher, and to *hearsay* in proof of the truth of the facts related to us. Both these kinds have been attacked by Mr. Paine, and have even been treated by him with a degree of scorn and ridicule which may amuse some, and confound others, but which will disgust the serious believer, and carry no conviction to the breast of the cool and

dispassionate enquirer. If Christians have been for so long a period, believers in a *cunningly devised fable*; if so much labour and abilities as have been employed in examining into, and establishing its evidence, investigating its doctrines, and disseminating its principles, have been employed in vain: if Mr. Paine had at length discovered what escaped the critical examination of more learned, and *at least* equally ingenious men; in this case, and such Mr. Paine supposes it to be, it would have been but common decency, but common humanity, to have communicated this discovery, with more respect to the long established prejudices of mankind, and to have refrained from unnecessary abuse of what most of his readers might esteem sacred truths. He could not but know that ridicule is no just test of truth, and that abuse, even when properly applied, does no credit to him who makes use of it. But I am wandering from my subject, since it was not my design to find fault with Mr. Paine's conduct, but only to refute his arguments.

The questions at issue between Mr. Paine and the advocates of Christianity, which it is my intention to consider, are the following :

Is there sufficient evidence from testimony (or *hearsay*) to prove that Christianity was professed upwards of seventeen hundred years ago; that Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, was the founder of it; that the original professors of it underwent many sufferings, solely in consequence of their belief in it, and that they submitted from the same motives to new rules of conduct?

Is there sufficient evidence to prove the genuineness of the books of the new testament, and their having been written by the persons whose names they bear?

Are miracles credible proofs of a divine mission? and have we sufficient evidence that they were wrought by Jesus Christ and his apostles in confirmation of his having been sent by God?

Can there be such a thing as prophecy? and in what circumstances may we regard prophecies as proofs of a divine mission? Have we any evidence from prophecies in the new testament of the truth of Christianity?

Is

Is there sufficient reason for believing in the divine mission of Moses, and the genuineness of the books of the old testament?

Do the prophecies recorded in any of these books relating to the appearance or death of Christ, or to any other circumstances tend to confirm the truth of revelation?

Is there evidence of a like nature to prove, that Mahomet was a prophet sent from God? Or are we able to discover strong marks of imposture, and to perceive a material difference between the evidences of his religion, and that of Christ?

Such are the subjects of our discussion, and such is the order in which I shall solicit your attention to them.

LETTER

LETTER VIII.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

THE first subject of enquiry to which I shall request your attention is this; have we sufficient evidence from testimony, to prove that Christianity was professed upwards of seventeen hundred years ago; that one Jesus of Nazareth, called also Christ, who was crucified at Jerusalem in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar was the founder of it; that the original professors of it underwent many sufferings, solely in consequence of their belief in it, and that they submitted from the same motive to new rules of conduct? Such of you as have read Mr. Paine's work, will recollect that he has admitted the *existence and crucifixion of such a person as Jesus Christ, to be within the limits of probability*; and that he has acknowledged the excellency of his character, and moral doctrine; he does not however give any reason from testimony, for believing part and rejecting the rest, and indeed, if I may judge from his work, there seems to be so much fancy and caprice, and so little judgment both in what he admits and rejects, notwithstanding some acute remarks on particular circumstances, that I shall make little or no use of his concessions.

The Christian religion does now exist, and prevails in almost all Europe, and in some parts of Asia, Africa, and America, and there must have been some adequate cause for this existence. We might therefore, if inclined to shrink from the enquiry, call upon Mr. Paine, or other unbelievers, to account for present appearances in a satisfactory manner, and show that different circumstances from what we assert, were the cause of them. This is seldom even attempted, perhaps from a consciousness that it could not be successfully executed. It is a much easier task to make witty remarks on the story of Jonah, or Samson, and to assert (without any proof) that the books of scripture are forgeries, that the whole is an imposture, and that we should do much better without it. Such assertions do not require much room, and as care is taken to render the books as entertaining as possible, they are read with avidity, and produce their pernicious effect, whilst the dry, sober appeal to reason and facts which the defender of Christianity adopts, is thrown by neglected. I could without apprehension, rest the truth of Christianity on this, that the present establishment

blissment of it cannot be accounted for in any other manner; but as I do not chose to imitate Mr. Paine in trusting to assertions, I shall proceed with the evidence. It has been shown by Archdeacon Paley in a very ingenious manner, in a work which I cannot too strongly recommend to the perusal of all who can procure it, "that a man left to himself, without any
 " more information, than a knowledge of the existence of the
 " religion, of the general story upon which it is founded, and
 " that no act of power, force, or authority, was concerned
 " in its first success, would conclude from the very nature
 " and exigency of the case, that the author of the religion,
 " during his life, and his immediate disciples after his death,
 " exerted themselves in spreading and publishing the institu-
 " tion throughout the country in which it began, and into
 " which it was first carried; that in the prosecution of this
 " purpose, they underwent the labours and troubles, which
 " we observe the propagators of new sects to undergo; that
 " the attempt must necessarily have also been in a high degree
 " dangerous; that from the subject of the mission, compared
 " with the fixed opinions and prejudices of those to whom
 " the missionaries were to address themselves, they could
 " hardly fail of encountering strong and frequent opposition;
 " that, by the hand of government, as well as from the sud-
 " den fury and unbridled licence of the people, they would
 " oftentimes experience injurious, and cruel treatment; that
 " at any rate, they must have always had so much to fear for
 " their personal safety, as to have passed their lives in a state
 " of constant peril and anxiety; and lastly, that their mode
 " of life and conduct, visibly at least, corresponded with the
 " institution which they delivered, and so far, was both new,
 " and required continual self-denial."* The arguments by
 which these are supported, are too long to be introduced here, but the consideration of them may nevertheless be of some use. The testimony to the facts, I wish to prove, is of three kinds, that of the Heathen and Jewish writers, that of the writers of the books of the New Testament, and that of early Christian writers. I shall begin with the first, because being that of men who were enemies, or at least, not friends to Christianity, it is not liable to suspicion. The first Heathen writer I shall produce is Tacitus. Tacitus, as it may be necessary

* "View of the evidences of Christianity." Part I. Chap. 1.—Vol. I, page 20, 45.

cessary to inform some of you, was a Roman who lived in the first century, and filled the first magistracy under the emperor in the year 97, that is about seventy years after the death of Christ. Pliny a contemporary, whom we shall have occasion to mention, speaks of him with the greatest respect, and his credit has never been impeached. This Tacitus wrote two principal works, one called *Annals*, giving an account of events, beginning with Tiberius, and ending with the death of Nero; and a *history* beginning with Galba and ending at the death of Domitian; writings, which as has been often observed, have gained him more honour than all his dignities.

This historian speaking of the fire which happened at Rome in the tenth year of Nero, and about thirty years after the death of Christ, and of the suspicions which were entertained that the emperor himself was concerned in causing it, says,
 “ But neither these exertions, nor his largesses to the people, nor his offerings to the Gods, did away the infamous imputation under which Nero lay, of having ordered the city to be set on fire. To put an end therefore to this report, he laid the guilt, and inflicted the most cruel punishment upon a set of people, who were held in abhorrence for their crimes, and called by the vulgar Christians. The founder of that name was Christ, who suffered death in the reign of Tiberius, under his procurator, Pontius Pilate. This pernicious superstition, thus checked for a while broke out again, and spread not only over Judea, where the evil originated, but through Rome also, whither every thing bad upon earth finds its way and is practised. Some who confessed their sect were first seized, and afterwards by their information a vast multitude were apprehended, who were convicted, not so much of the crime of burning Rome, as of hatred to mankind. Their sufferings at their execution, were aggravated by insult and mockery, for some were disguised in the skins of wild beasts, and worried to death by dogs—some were crucified—others wrapt in pitched shirts, (as we learn from another source) were set on fire when the day closed, that they might serve as lights to illuminate the night. Nero lent his own gardens for these executions; and exhibited at the same time a mock Circensian entertainment, being a spectator of the whole in the dress of a charioteer, sometimes mingling with the crowd on foot, and sometimes viewing the sight from his car. This conduct made the sufferers pitied, and though they were criminals, and deserving the severest punishment,
 “ yet

“ yet they were considered as sacrificed, not so much out of
 “ a regard to the publick good, as to gratify the cruelty of
 “ one man.” Such of you as chuse, may read this in the
 original, or in Mr. Murphy’s excellent translation, in the
 forty-fourth chapter of the fifteenth book of the *Annals*.
 This passage proves, that Christ was put to death by Pon-
 tius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea : that from him
 the Christians took their name : that in Judea, where it
 had its rise, it spread, notwithstanding the ignominious
 death of the founder, and the opposition it met with : that it
 made its way to Rome, the capital of the empire, situated at
 a great distance ; and that within thirty-four years from the
 death of the author, there was in that city a great multitude
 of Christians : and it also appears that the professors of this
 religion were reproached and hated, and underwent many and
 grievous sufferings. From the fact of the number of Chris-
 tians in Rome, Archdeacon Paley observes, the two following
 inferences may be fairly drawn ; “ first, that if, in the space
 “ of thirty-four years from its commencement, the religion
 “ had spread throughout Judea, had extended itself to Rome,
 “ and there had numbered a great multitude of converts, the
 “ original teachers and missionaries of the institution could not
 “ have been idle ; secondly, that when the author of the under-
 “ taking was put to death as a malefactor for his attempt, the
 “ endeavours of his followers to establish his religion, in the same
 “ country, amongst the same people, and in the same age,
 “ could not but be attended with danger.” As to what
 Tacitus says against the Christians, it must be remembered
 that he was attached to the idolatrous worship established
 at Rome, and thought any neglect of the gods, or innovation
 with respect to the prevailing system, criminal and dangerous
 to the state ; he brings no specifick charge against them, and
 from the severity of their punishment moving compassion, it
 may be inferred, that they were not such monsters of wicked-
 ness as he represents them. Be this as it may, it is very plain
 the profession of Christianity was neither honourable, nor pro-
 fitable at Rome. And while this passage of Tacitus is in your
 thoughts, I would ask you what probability there is of men’s
 having borne such cruelties, with the sole view of mending the
 Heathen mythology by a *pious fraud* ? For Mr. Paine is will-
 ing to allow, that the first preachers had good intentions.—
 Much is talked about our experience.—Now does our expe-
 rience warrant us to suppose, that men have so much disin-
 terested benevolence, as to endure such tortures for adhering

to a lie, merely to impose one false system in the room of another, because they thought it better? On such a supposition they were certainly men of a very different species from what we are.

Martial, a Roman poet, who published several books of Epigrams, and who lived at the same time with Tacitus, is thought to have alluded to the punishment inflicted on the Christians by putting on pitch shirts, in one of his epigrams, and to have made it the object of his ridicule, which would prove the notoriety of it.

Juvenal another Roman poet, living at the same time, intending as it should seem, to commemorate the cruelties exercised under Nero's government, has the following lines:—

“ *Pone Tigellinum tedâ lucebis in illâ*

“ *Quâ stantes ardent, qui fixo gutture fumant,*

“ *Et latum mediâ fulcum deducit arenâ.*”

“ Describe Tigellinus (a corrupt minister under Nero) and you shall suffer the same punishment with those who stand burning in their own flame and smoke; their head being held up by a stake fixed to their chin, till they make a long stream (of blood and melted sulphur) on the ground.”— On this passage it has been justly remarked, and the remark is equally applicable to that from Martial, that considered by itself, the subject of the allusion might be doubtful, but when connected with other testimonies, and particularly that of Tacitus, which mentions the species of punishments they were made to undergo, it seems very probable that the executions of the Christians were referred to.

A more direct testimony occurs in the works of Suetonius, a Roman of distinction, who was secretary to the emperor Adrian, and may be placed in the year 110. He also was intimate with Pliny the younger, and was recommended by him in strong terms to the emperor Trajan. Suetonius wrote *lives of the first twelve Cæsars*, and in several of them has mentioned circumstances, which Dr. Lardner considers as bearing testimony to the progress of Christianity. The only passage I shall notice is in the life of Nero, when describing the transactions of his reign, he says, “ The Christians a set of men,

“ of a new and mischievous (or magical) superstition, were
 “ punished.” This, Dr. Lardner thinks, may include more
 extensive sufferings in the provinces, as well as the city, which
 we are told by Christian writers was the case.

The above testimonies, relate to what took place according
 to the course of nature, in the life-time probably of some of
 the apostles, and certainly in the life-time of those who were
 converted by the apostles, or in their time. And as the found-
 er of the religion suffered death in the execution of his de-
 sign, and as many of the first converts also suffered the greatest
 extremities, it is hardly credible, that those who came *between*
 the two, the companions of the author during his life, and
 teachers of his institution after his death, could go about their
 undertaking with ease and safety.

The next Heathen writer, I shall mention, is Pliny the
 younger, a most accomplished man, and the favourite of the
 emperor Trajan, who advanced him to the first offices of the
 state. About the year 106, he went as governor to the pro-
 vince of Bithynia in Asia, from which place he wrote to the
 emperor about the Christians, and his letter, with the answer
 to it, are preserved in the collection of his letters, which have
 been translated by Mr. Melmoth. The two I allude to, are
 the 97th and 98th of the 10th book. These letters, which are
 too long to insert, prove three things: first, the number of
 Christians in Bithynia and Pontus, in less than 80 years after
 the death of Christ. “ Many of all ages, and every rank, of
 “ both sexes likewise, are accused, and will be accused. Nor
 “ has the contagion of this superstition seized cities only, but
 “ the lesser towns also, and the open country.” And he
 speaks of the temples having been almost forsaken, and sacri-
 fices almost entirely neglected. Secondly, they prove the
 bitterness of their persecutions, even under an emperor, and
 governor who were esteemed mild, and when there was no
 actual law existing against them, as appears from Pliny’s ig-
 norance how he should act, and the emperor’s giving him a
 rule for his direction. Accusations, trials, and examinations,
 were, and had been going on against them in these provinces:
 informations were delivered without the name of the authors,
 containing the names of persons suspected of holding, or fa-
 vouring the religion, and in consequence of these informations
 many had been apprehended, of whom, some boldly avowed
 their profession and died in the cause; others denied that they

were Christians; others, acknowledging that they had once been Christians, declared that they had long ceased to be such: which proves that the profession of Christianity, was at that time attended with fear and danger. Thirdly, Pliny's letter is a striking testimony to the morality of the early Christians. He says, that persons who had recanted, "affirmed that the whole of their faults or error lay in this, that they were wont to meet together on a stated day before it was light, and sing among themselves alternately a hymn to Christ, as a God, and bind themselves by an oath, not to the commission of any wickedness, but not to be guilty of theft or robbery, or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor to deny a pledge committed to them, when called upon to return it. When these things were performed, it was their custom to separate, and then to come together again to a meal, which they ate in common, without any disorder;" and to be more certain, "he examined by torture, two maid-servants, who were called ministers, but could discover nothing beside a bad and excessive superstition." Such a testimony from a person much prejudiced against them, is very much to their honour.

Epiſtetus the ſtoick philoſopher, or his diſciple Arrian, who both lived about this time, ſpeaks of the conſtancy of the Chriſtians, (or Galileans as he calls them, and as the emperor Julian afterwards called them) and aſcribes it to madneſs or habit, as the emperor Marcus Aurelius, fifty years after, does to obſtinacy, which prove their exiſtence as a ſect, and their ſufferings. Celfus lived in the time of Marcus Aurelius, about the year 176, and wrote a work againſt Chriſtianity entitled, "*The True Word*." This work, like many others, has been loſt, but there is an answer to it exiſting, in which there are a great number of paſſages from it, whence it is evident, that Celfus was acquainted with the goſpels, and acknowledged the facts, but accounted for them in a different manner, and turned them into ridicule. He attributed Chriſt's miracles to magick, which our modern unbelievers are too wiſe to believe in, and therefore they have reſorted to the new ground of denying the facts. Lucian, part of whoſe works are known to almoſt every ſchool-boy, was the friend and contemporary of Celfus, to whom he dedicated one of his works. This witty epicurean philoſopher, who has ſo ludicrouſly expoſed the Heathen ſuperſtition, alſo made the Chriſtians objects of his ridicule, and by that means furniſhes us with his
teſtimony

testimony to many circumstances. From a passage in his life of Peregrinus we learn, that the founder of the Christian religion was crucified in Palestine; that he was the great master of the Christians, and the first author of the principles received by them; that those men, called Christians, had peculiarly strong hopes of immortal life, and a great contempt for this world and its enjoyments: that they courageously endured many afflictions upon account of their principles, and sometimes surrendered themselves to sufferings. Honour and probity prevailed so much among them, that they trusted each other without security. Their master had earnestly recommended to all his followers mutual love; by which also they were much distinguished. And their assiduity in relieving and comforting one another when under affliction, was known to all men: nor is it any disparagement to them, to have been imposed upon by Peregrinus, who was admired by many others, and perhaps was not so bad a man, as Lucian insinuates.* In his Alexander, or Pseudomantis, he speaks of the Epicureans and Christians as being persecuted at the instigation of this Alexander, who was a great impostor, *for raising slanderous stories against him*. Galen, the famous physician, who was also contemporary, in his work on the pulse, has twice mentioned Christ; and in such a manner, as to induce some to think he was acquainted with the gospels.—The passages certainly prove the notoriety of the Christian religion at that time. There are many other Heathen writers whose testimony might be adduced, especially Porphyry and Julian, but I have already taken up too much of your time, and having quoted those of the two first centuries, shall leave such of you as wish for further information, and have leisure for the pursuit, to consult the works of Dr. Lardner and others, who have fully investigated the subject. Before I conclude this part, I must however caution you from expecting too much from Heathen testimonies. Those who fully studied the subject frequently became Christians, and their testimony is of course transferred; others who were moderate, or half Christians would hold their tongues lest they might draw upon themselves persecution, so that they would scarcely be mentioned by any Heathen writer,

* These and many other remarks have been taken from Dr. Lardner's Jewish and Heathen testimonies, on whose known veracity and critical exactness I have relied in many quotations, having neither leisure nor opportunity to consult the originals,

writer, except by such as were much prejudiced against them, or from interested motives joined in the popular cry.

I shall now proceed to consider the testimony of Josephus the famous Jewish historian, which must on many accounts be regarded as of great consequence. Josephus was of the race of the Jewish priests, and descended from a family which for a considerable time, had the supreme government of the Jewish nation. He was born in the year of Christ 37, that is about eight years after his death. He made such proficiency in knowledge that at the age of fourteen, he was consulted by the principal men of the city about the right interpretation of things in the law. At nineteen he became a *Pharisee*, and entered upon the management of publick affairs: he went on an embassy to Nero, and was afterwards a distinguished general against the Romans, but being obliged to surrender himself, he got into the good graces of Vespasian, who was afterwards emperor, and was patronised by him, and his sons Titus, and Domitian. Such a man must evidently have had the best information about transactions in Judea, both in his own times, and previous to them. This information he published in two works, *Jewish antiquities*, containing the history of the Jews from the creation to the 12th year of Nero, and a *history of the Jewish war in 7 books*; the publication of which may be set down about A. D. 76, within fifty years after the death of Christ. In the former of these works, there are three passages which demand attention. In the first (*Antiquit. B. xviii. C. 5. § 1. 2.*) he mentions John the Baptist having been put to death by Herod, with other circumstances mentioned in scripture, and speaks of John “ as a just man, who had called “ upon the Jews to be baptised, and to practice virtue, exercising both justice towards men, and piety towards God.” The genuineness of this passage I cannot find has ever been questioned, and the connection between John’s preaching and Christ’s is so great, that it may be considered as worth notice. In another passage (*B. 20. C. 8.*) he mentions “ James, the “ brother of him who is called Christ, being stoned to death.” This however is doubtful, and not being equally important, I shall proceed to the most material one; it occurs in the 18th book, 3 chap. 3 section, and is as follows; “ at that time “ lived Jesus, a wise man, if he may be called a man; for “ he performed many wonderful works. He was a teacher “ of such men as received the truth with pleasure. He drew “ over to him many Jews and Gentiles. This was the Christ.

“ And

“ And when Pilate, at the instigation of the chief men among
 “ us, had condemned him to the cross, they who before had
 “ conceived an affection for him, did not cease to adhere to
 “ him. For on the third day he appeared to them alive
 “ again, the divine prophets having foretold these, and many
 “ other wonderful things concerning him. And the sect of
 “ the Christians, so called from him, subsists to this time.”
 The authenticity of this remarkable passage is disputed, and
 it has been deemed by some learned Christians as well as by
 Deists, an interpolation. The arguments on each side are too
 long to mention, nor are they necessary for my present de-
 sign. The passage is either genuine, or it is not. If it be
 genuine, the testimony contained in it is very valuable, to the
 facts I wish to prove; but if not, which I am inclined to think
 most probable, in this case his silence is of more importance
 than his testimony, and equally serves to authenticate the truth
 of those facts upon which Christianity is founded. This may
 at first seem a strange assertion, but perhaps you will assent
 to it, when you consider that Josephus could not be ignorant
 of the existence of such a man as Christ, or of his having founded
 a sect which had made great progress in the world. These
 circumstances which Tacitus and Suetonius have mentioned,
 were too notorious for Josephus a Jew to be ignorant of. Did
 he then think them too inconsiderable to occupy a place in his
 history? We may conclude he did not from the following cir-
 cumstances. 1st In his time, Christians were so numerous a
 society as to engage the attention of the Roman Emperors,
 who took very great pains to exterminate their opinions, and
 Tacitus and Suetonius who could not be so much interested as
 Josephus, considered the rise and establishment of Christianity
 as of sufficient magnitude to rank amongst the events, trans-
 mitted by them to posterity. 2^{dly} Josephus makes mention
 of three Jewish sects, though two of them had ceased to exist;
 he should not then have been silent with respect to the Chris-
 tians who had increased in all the provinces, and even in the
 capital of the empire. 3^{dly} He has given a very full and ac-
 curate account of a great number of impostors, or heads of par-
 ties, which arose amongst the Jews, from the time of Augustus
 to the ruin of Jerusalem. Now Jesus founded a party much
 more considerable, and which occasioned much greater noise,
 than all those whom this author has mentioned. “ These im-
 “ postors, says the Abbé Bullet, these ring-leaders, these men
 “ who had collected mobs, had no followers beyond the pre-
 “ cincts of Judea: their partizans and adherents were soon
 “ dispersed

“ dispersed, and at the time Josephus wrote, nothing but
 “ the bare remembrance of them remained. It was far dif-
 “ ferent with the sect, the assemblies and community Christ had
 “ formed; it not only subsisted in the time of the historian,
 “ but was extended through every province of the empire,
 “ and flourished in the very capital. The sovereigns of the
 “ world exerted all their authority to suppress it. It deserved
 “ then to have been noticed by Josephus.”——Josephus
 could not think the facts in question too inconsiderable to be
 noticed. “ How then, consistently with the laws of history,
 “ and the method which he had prescribed to himself, of re-
 “ cording every thing he knew, could he preserve an entire
 “ silence on this head? Let us try to solve this ænigma.
 “ Either this historian must have believed that all which the
 “ disciples of Jesus had said of their master was false, or else
 “ was true. If false, he could not have remained silent;
 “ every thing would have stimulated him to speak out on the
 “ occasion; the interest of virtue; zeal for his own religion, the
 “ foundations of which Christians had sapped by their impos-
 “ tures; the love of his own nation, who were accused, and
 “ upbraided with having from a malignant and cruel jealousy
 “ put to death the Messiah, the son of God. By exposing
 “ the impostures of the apostles, he would have overwhelmed
 “ with confusion the enemies of his own people; have ingra-
 “ tiated himself most effectually with his nation; conciliated
 “ the favour of those emperors, who persecuted the growing
 “ cause of Christianity; attracted the applauses of all who
 “ looked with horror on this new superstition; and undeceived
 “ the Christians themselves, whom the first disciples of Jesus
 “ had so miserably misled. Can any person for a moment
 “ believe, that a man able to expose so gross an imposture,
 “ and who had so many powerful inducements to do it, should,
 “ in spite of every incitement persevere in the most obstinate
 “ silence; especially, when so natural an occasion solicited
 “ him to speak? If false miracles were propagated for the
 “ purpose of seducing the people of our days, with what zeal,
 “ with what ardour would our writers march forth to detect
 “ the imposture, and prevent the seduction! Should we not
 “ regard their silence, on such an occasion, as a criminal pre-
 “ varication? It appears then indisputable, that if Josephus
 “ had believed the relations of the apostles concerning their
 “ master to have been false, he would have taken care to de-
 “ clare his conviction: but if he did not believe them to be
 “ false, he must have known them to be true; and for fear
 “ of

“ of displeasing his nation, the Romans, and their emperors,
 “ held his peace.” * It may be observed, in confirmation of
 this argument, that such was the time-serving and worldly dis-
 position of Josephus, that he would neglect no opportunity of
 pleasing his own nation, or the Romans, nor can we suppose
 a regard for truth would have as much influence upon him, as
 a regard to his own interest. Whichsoever side of the
 question then is taken, we may consider Josephus as serving
 to authenticate the truth of the facts on which Christianity is
 founded. I come now to the testimony of the writers of the
 books of the New Testament. Of the primitive condition of
 Christianity we can acquire only a distant and general view
 from Heathen writers. “ It is in our own books that we must
 “ seek for a detail of the transaction. This is what we might
 “ naturally expect; for who would write a history of Christia-
 “ nity but a Christian? Who was likely to record the travels,
 “ sufferings, labours, or successes of the apostles but one of
 “ their own number, or of their followers?” Now these books
 contain an account of the facts we want to prove. We have
 four histories of Jesus Christ, which relate that in consequence
 of his undertaking, he was put to death as a malefactor at Je-
 rusalem in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, and under the procu-
 ratorship of Pontius Pilate, as mentioned by Tacitus. We
 are told that on the third day he rose from the dead, and ap-
 peared to his disciples. We have a history taking up the nar-
 rative from his death, and carrying on an account of the
 propagation of the religion, and of some of the most eminent
 persons engaged in it for a space of thirty years, and of its
 being preached even in Rome; points which are also con-
 firmed by Tacitus—and we have also a collection of letters
 written by certain principal agents in the business, and in the
 midst of their concern and connection with it. And these
 writings not only give an account of the origin of Christianity,
 but they attest the sufferings of the first teachers of it, in every
 variety of form in which it can be conceived to appear; di-
 rectly and indirectly, expressly and incidentally, by assertion
 recital and allusion, by narrative of facts, and by arguments
 and discourses built upon these facts, either referring to them,
 or necessarily presupposing them. These books also testify to
 their adopting a new and peculiar course of private life. We

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are

* See this argument of the Abbe Bullet's more at large in the ap-
 pendix to Dr. Kippis's life of Lardner, prefixed to his works;

are told of *their continuing with one accord in prayer and supplication, of their continuing daily with one accord in the temple, of many being gathered together praying*, and we know from the books what rules of purity, and maxims of benevolence, they taught, which, if in any degree regarded, would produce a system of conduct, and what is more difficult to preserve, a disposition of mind and a regulation of affections, different from any thing to which they had hitherto been accustomed, and different from what they would see in others. This change is often referred to in the letters of their teachers, and the testimony of Pliny, before mentioned tends to confirm it.

I have here assumed the genuineness of these books, which I certainly had no right yet to do; but it will be the business of the next letter to prove it from external and internal testimony; and I wish you particularly to remark that whatever opinion myself, or other Christians may entertain of inspiration, I have spoken of them hitherto, and intend to speak of them in these letters, only as the works of fallible men, but entitled to as much credit as the writings of Cæsar or Xenophon, or others describing events which came within their own knowledge. I well know that the inspiration of the scriptures in any degree can only be proved from the scriptures themselves, and that it is therefore necessary in an argument of this nature, to prove the truth, or to use more exact language, the strong probability of the facts, without any reference to inspiration.

It remains for me to bring some evidence from the early Christian writers, to prove the above facts. I well know, that Mr. Paine has endeavoured to raise a great prejudice against them, as well as against the writers of scripture; he speaks of them as being themselves concerned in establishing this *pious fraud*, and their testimony of course would be considered as of little weight. This appears a very uncandid way of arguing, for however unwilling we might be to pin our faith on theirs, and take for granted every thing they relate, yet we can conceive no reason why they should tell a lie, and afterwards suffer death, as many of them did, to prove that it was not one. The point of view in which I shall consider their testimony, both now and in the next letter, with respect to the genuineness of the scriptures, is this; we have books bearing the names of early Christians, which have been mentioned by contemporaries, and succeeding writers, and of which early copies have been preserved, which books we may therefore conclude were
written

written at an early period, and even though improperly ascribed to the supposed authors, must of necessity throw light upon circumstances, which had lately, or were then taking place. It is therefore fair, to produce these books as testimonies to such facts, as the existence and sufferings of Christians in their times, and the books which they had seen and read. To reject their testimony in such cases, is I conceive very unreasonable, and such conduct as would not be adopted in any other instance whatever; for it is not usual, I imagine, to reject the testimony of an original witness, on account of supposed partiality and attachment to the cause, which his work was designed to support. We receive his account with caution, but we do not reject it—and this will be the case, especially, when it was evidently not his professed object to prove the fact in question, but the mention of it is inadvertently introduced, when treating on another subject. After this remark I shall venture to produce their evidence as strongly confirming that already given.

In an epistle bearing the name of *Barnabas*, the companion of Paul, which is generally esteemed genuine, and which, if not written by him, was certainly written in the first century, before the entire reduction of Judea; we have an account of the sufferings of Christ, his choice of apostles, and their number, his death and resurrection, with many other circumstances, agreeing in the main with the accounts in the gospels and acts.—In an epistle, generally ascribed to Clement, a hearer of Paul, although written for a purpose remotely connected with the Christian history, we have the resurrection of Christ, and the subsequent mission of the apostles, recorded in these satisfactory terms: “The apostles have preached
“ to us from our Lord Jesus Christ, from God.—For having
“ received their command, and being *thoroughly assured by the*
“ *resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ*, they went abroad publishing that the kingdom of God was at hand.” He mentions also the humility, yet the power, of Christ, and his crucifixion. He speaks of Peter and Paul, as faithful and righteous pillars of the church, and mentions their labours and sufferings.—Hermas, a writer of nearly the same period, in a piece little connected with historical recitals, speaks of “those
“ who have believed and suffered death for the name of Christ,
“ and have endured with a ready mind, and have given up
“ their lives with a ready heart.”—Ignatius who lived at Antioch in the year 107, and Polycarp, who lived at Smyrna

about the same time, and is supposed to have known the apostle John, in epistles written for the purpose of exhorting their fellow Christians, mention the same facts, and it may be observed that both of them suffered martyrdom on account of their belief.—Papias of Hierapolis in Asia, A. D. 116.—Justin Martyr, who was originally an heathen philosopher, who afterwards presented an apology for Christianity, to the emperor Antoninus Pius, about A. D. 140, and was a martyr.—Tatian, who was a man of learning, and a heretic, A. D. 172.—Irenæus a disciple of Polycarp, who preached afterwards at Lyons in Gaul, and suffered martyrdom there, A. D. 178.—Athenagoras, who is styled an Athenian and a philosopher, and who presented an apology to the emperor Antoninus Pius.—Theophilus of Antioch, whose works show he was well acquainted with Greek literature, A. D. 181.—Clement of Alexandria in Egypt, A. D. 194—and Tertullian of Carthage in Africa, also a man of great learning, who like all the rest, was originally an heathen, about 200.—All these and many others whom I omit for sake of brevity, bear their testimony to the existence of a sect of Christians in their days, of its being numerous, and having extended to many distant countries, of its being much persecuted, and of the good conduct of the disciples. These men are many of them styled Bishops, but it should be remembered, without entering into any discussion about the office, that in those days, it was attended with no profit, and much labour and danger, for it pointed them out as particular objects of persecution.—I may then, I think, assert that the principal parts of the account are recognized by a series of succeeding writers. In addition to these testimonies, I would observe, that there is no account of the origin of the religion substantially different from that of the scriptures; that there was an early and extensive prevalence of rites and institutions, which result from that account; and that this account bears in its construction, proof that it is an account of facts which were known and believed at the time; I have already dwelled so long on this part of the subject, that I must content myself with barely mentioning these things, which I conceive are sufficient, to support an assurance, that the story which we have now, is in its principal facts, the story which Christians had at the beginning. “For instance, I make no doubt, for the reasons which have
“been stated, that the resurrection of the founder of the re-
“ligion, was always a part of the Christian story. Nor can
“a doubt of this remain upon the mind of any one, who re-
“flects

" fleets that the resurrection is, in some form or other as-
 " serted, referred to, or assumed, in every Christian writing,
 " of every description which hath come down to us. And if
 " our evidence stopped here, we should have a strong case to
 " offer : for we should have to alledge, that, in the reign of
 " Tiberius Cæsar, a certain number of persons set about an
 " attempt of establishing a new religion in the world ; in the
 " prosecution of which purpose, they *voluntarily* encountered
 " great dangers, undertook great labours, sustained great suf-
 " ferings, all *for* a miraculous story which they published
 " wherever they came ; and that the resurrection of a dead
 " man, whom during his life they had followed, and accom-
 " panied, was a constant part of this story. I know nothing
 " in the above statement, which can with any appearance of
 " reason be disputed ; and I know nothing in the history of
 " the human species similar to it."

LETTER

LETTER IX.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

WHAT I propose to consider in the present letter is, whether there be sufficient evidence to prove the genuineness of the books of the new Testament, and their having been written by the persons whose names they bear. It may be proper in the first place, to mention Mr. Paine's objection. *We are told,* says he, *that these books are the word of God. It is therefore proper for us to know who told us so, that we may know what credit to give to the report. The answer to this question is, that nobody can tell, except that we tell one another so. The case, however, historically appears to be as follows: when the church mythologists established their system, they collected all the writings they could find, and managed them as they pleased. It is a matter altogether of uncertainty to us, whether such of the writings as now appear under the name of the new Testament, are in the same state in which those collectors say they found them, or whether they added, altered, abridged, or dressed them up. Be this as it may, they decided by vote which of the books out of the collection they made, should be the word of God, and which should not. Had they acted otherwise, all the people since calling themselves Christians, had believed otherwise; for the belief of the one comes from the vote of the other. Who the people were who did all this, we know nothing of; they called themselves by the general name of the church; and this is all we know of the matter. After this, he says, that we have no other external evidence for believing them to be the word of God, and that is no evidence. On this passage I beg leave to observe, that Mr. Paine has confounded two different questions, first, whether these books are genuine, and written by the authors whose names they bear? and secondly, whether they contain a revelation from God, which I understand, by the word of God? These I shall separate, the first will be considered in the present letter, the other will be the general conclusion to be drawn at the close of the work. This confusion of distinct questions, is one thing which makes *The Age of Reason* likely to mislead, and difficult to answer. I must also contend, that Mr. Paine has not fairly stated the nature of the evidence; he speaks of *Christian mythologists*, as managing these writings as they pleased, and voting some books to be the word of God, while they rejected others, and he insinuates that they did this by caprice, or as it suited their sentiments*

Tentiments. How far such assertions are warranted by facts, will appear from the evidence I shall produce in support of the genuineness of these books, and I must again intreat you to remember, that I do not *at present* contend for them as inspired, or as a *word of God*, but only as books written by one Matthew, &c. who were disciples of Jesus Christ, and preachers of his religion, whether that religion were true or false.

It is a very common mistake amongst Christians, and unbelievers in general take advantage of it, to consider the bible, or at least the new Testament, as one book, every part of which rests on the same evidence, and that all must be received or none, whereas the fact is, that it is a collection of different books, many of them by different writers, and it is no more fair to join them together in this manner, than it would be to infer, that the writings of Sallust and Cæsar, must stand or fall together, or to conclude that Mr. Locke did not write the *essay on the human understanding*, because the *common place book to the bible* generally attributed to him, is spurious.— We have not only evidence that they were written by different authors, but the variations in their accounts prove it fully. I would observe then, that such was the situation of the writers to whom the four gospels are ascribed, that if any one of the four be genuine, it is sufficient for the purpose of establishing the truth of the facts before-mentioned. The authors of all of them lived at the time and on the spot. Two of them were eye-witnesses of the facts, and ear witnesses of the discourses, and wrote from their own personal knowledge.— If then Matthew and John wrote the narratives (or *anecdotes*, for I have no objection to Mr. Paine's term) to which their name is prefixed, these narratives must either be true in their principal parts, or must be wilful and meditated falsehoods. Yet the writers who fabricated these falsehoods, if they be such, are of the number of those, who unless the whole contexture of the Christian story be a dream, sacrificed their ease and safety in the cause, and for a purpose the most inconsistent that is possible with dishonest intentions. *They were villains for no end, but to teach honestly, and martyrs, without the least prospect of honour, or advantage.* The gospels ascribed to Mark and Luke, although not the narratives of eye-witnesses, are, if genuine, removed only one degree, having been written by contemporaries, who were companions of eye-witnesses, and received their accounts from them. If then the books are genuine,

genuine, they contain those facts which the original preachers of the religion alledged, whether those facts be true or false. Supposing even one of these narratives to be genuine, we have an account of what the apostles preached, from one of their own number, or at least from one who was not only contemporary with them, but was associated with them in their ministry. I would also observe, that we should consider the *aggregate* evidence of these books, as well as their *separate* evidence. Now there is in the evangelick history accumulation of testimony which belongs hardly to any other, but which our habitual mode of reading the scriptures sometimes causes us to overlook. When a passage is read out of an ancient Christian writer, which relates to the history of Christ, we are immediately sensible of the confirmation it brings to the scripture account. Now had we been accustomed to read Matthew's gospel alone, and only knew Luke's, as we do the writings of the apostolical fathers, (that is, had known that such a writing was extant and acknowledged) when, on reading it, we found many facts recorded in it, that Matthew had recorded, and other facts of a similar nature added, we should consider it as additional evidence. The gospel of John would occasion a like sentiment; and even considering Mark's as an abridgement of the same history, made in that early period, it would be a valuable testimony. If we should likewise meet with a history taking up the story where the others left off, and continuing the narrative, the reality of the original story, would be in no small degree established by the supplement.— If afterwards we should discover a number of letters written by some of the principal agents, concerning the business, and during the time they were engaged in it, assuming all along the truth of the original story, agitating the questions which arose out of it, pressing the obligations which resulted from it, and giving advice and directions to those who acted upon it, I conceive in every one of these, we should find further support to the conclusion we had formed. If then these books are genuine, we have a *collection of proofs*, and not a naked or solitary testimony. I would notice here, a remark of Mr. Paine's, that *Christ himself wrote no account*, and in answer to it, I would observe, that Christ, as Eusebius says of the apostles, was not greatly concerned about the writing of books, being engaged in a more excellent ministry, which is above all human power. After all, should it not appear that these books were written by the persons to whom they are ascribed, it would not necessarily destroy our evidence to the facts. If they

they were written by early disciples of Christianity, and received by societies of Christians, which the apostles founded, *i. e.* supposed by them to contain authentick accounts of the transactions on which the religion rested; in this case, they must be considered as agreeing with what the apostles taught. Now the fact of their early existence and reputation, is made out by some ancient testimonies which do not happen to specify the names of the writers, and they contain assertions in the body of the history, which, though they do not disclose the names, fix the time and situation of the authors. “Not forgetting, therefore, what credit is due to the evangelick history, supposing any *one* of the four gospels to be genuine; what credit is due to the gospels, even supposing nothing to be known concerning them, but that they were written by early disciples of the religion, and received with deference by early Christian churches, more especially not forgetting what credit is due to the new Testament in its capacity of *cumulative* evidence; I now proceed to state the proper and distinct proofs, which show not only the general value of these records, but their specifick authority, and the high probability there is, that they actually came from the persons whose names they bear.”

There are however a few preliminary reflections, which will lead us with more regularity to the propositions upon which the close and particular discussion of the subject depends. Of which nature are the following: first, we can produce a great number of ancient *manuscripts* found in many different countries, and in countries widely distant from each other, all of them written before the art of printing was known, some, certainly, seven or eight hundred years old, and some which have probably been preserved above a thousand. We have also many ancient *versions*, or translations of these books, and some of them into languages which are not at present, nor for many ages have been, spoken in any part of the world. They are not then a *modern* contrivance. The number of manuscripts so dispersed affords an argument, in some measure, to the *senses*, that the scriptures were formerly more read, and sought after than any other books. It is observed also that they have suffered less injury from transcribers, than the works of any profane author of the same size and antiquity. Secondly, an argument of great weight with those, who, from their knowledge of the dead languages, are judges of the proofs upon which it is founded, and which is capable, through their testimony,

mony, of being addressed to every understanding, is that which arises from the style and language of the New Testament. It is such as might be expected from persons of the age, and in the situation of the apostles. It is the style neither of classical authors, nor of the ancient Christian fathers, but Greek coming from men of Hebrew origin; abounding with Hebraic and Syriac idioms, such as would naturally be found in the writings of men, who used a language spoken indeed where they lived, but not the common dialect of the country. This happy peculiarity is a strong proof of the genuineness of these writings. Thirdly, We admit the genuineness of other works exhibiting wonderful relations, without believing these relations: why then reject these books altogether, merely because they contain accounts of supernatural events? yet this seems to be the real cause of hesitation about it. Fourthly, If it had been an easy thing to have forged Christian writings, and to have obtained currency and reception to the forgeries, it is probable that we should have had many appearing in the name of Christ himself. No writings would have been received with so much avidity, and respect as these; consequently none afforded so great temptation to forgery. Thus I think that Mr. Paine's objection of our not having any thing said to be written by Christ himself, affords a strong proof of the genuineness of the books. Fifthly, If the ascriptions of the gospels to their respective authors had been arbitrary, or conjectural, the three first gospels would have been ascribed to more eminent men, as Peter, or James, or Paul: whereas there is hardly one of the apostles less noticed than Matthew, or of whom what is said, is less calculated to magnify his character. Of Mark, nothing is said in the gospels, and what is said of any person of that name in the acts, and epistles, bestows no praise or eminence upon him. The name of Luke is only mentioned three times very transiently in St. Paul's epistles. We may presume, therefore, that the writings were assigned to these authors upon proper knowledge and evidence, and not upon a voluntary choice of names. Sixthly, Christian writers and Christian churches appear to have soon arrived at a very general agreement upon the subject, and that, without the interposition of any publick authority. When the difference of opinion which prevailed, and prevails amongst Christians in other points, is considered, their concurrence in the canon of scripture is remarkable, and of great weight, especially as it seems to have been the result of private and free enquiry. We have no knowledge of authority in the question, before the council of Laodicea, in the
year

year 363. Probably the decree of this council rather declared than regulated the publick judgment, or, more properly was the judgment of some neighbouring churches, as the council was attended only by about forty bishops of Lydia, and the adjoining countries. And we find numerous Christian writers after this time, discussing the question, " what books were " entitled to be received as scripture," with great freedom, upon proper grounds of evidence, and without any reference to the decision at Laodicea. This remark shows the futility of what Mr. Paine has said about *voting* the books to be scripture. The substance however and strength of an argument, concerning the genuineness of ancient writings, is ancient testimony. This testimony I shall proceed to detail under different heads.

I. The historical books of the New Testament, meaning thereby the four gospels, and the acts of the apostles, are quoted, or alluded to, by a series of writers, beginning with those who were contemporary with the apostles, or who immediately followed them, and proceeding in close and regular succession from their time to the present.

" This is the manner in which we prove the genuineness
 " of all ancient writers, and it is the least liable to any prac-
 " tices of fraud, whilst it is not diminished by the lapse of
 " ages. Bishop Burnett, in his history of his own times, in-
 " serts extracts from Lord Clarendon's history. One such
 " insertion, is a proof that Lord Clarendon's history was ex-
 " tant, at the time when Bishop Burnet wrote; that it had
 " been read by Bishop Burnet, that it was received by Bishop
 " Burnet as a work of Lord Clarendon's, and regarded by
 " him as an authentick account of the transactions, which it
 " relates: and it will be a proof of these points, as long as
 " the books exist." Horace is a writer, the genuineness of
 whose works is never questioned, and why? because a con-
 temporary writer has mentioned his name as a poet, four or
 five writers in the next age, have also mentioned him, and
 one of them has given a character of his writings, and the
 same testimony has been borne by a few succeeding writers.
 Knowing he wrote poems, we therefore admit those ascribed to
 him as genuine; but the evidence would have been more per-
 fect, had any of them quoted some passage from his works
 which was now to be found in them; which is not the case.
 These instances may point out the nature and value of the
 I 2 present

present argument. The testimonies to be produced under this head, are the following :

1. An epistle ascribed to Barnabas, purporting to have been written soon after the destruction of Jerusalem, and during the calamities following it, which is quoted as Barnabas's, by Clement of Alexandria, A. D. 194, by Origen, A. D. 230 : and is mentioned as an ancient writing, bearing the name of Barnabas, by Eusebius, A. D. 315, and by Jerome A. D. 392. In this epistle words are quoted which can be found only in Matthew's gospel, and which occur twice in it : —and there are also many passages in which the sentiment is the same, as in Matthew's gospel, and in a few the same words.
2. An epistle said to be written by Clement, Bishop of Rome, to the church of Corinth, and said, by Dionysius, Bishop of Corinth, about the year 170, to have been usually read in that church from ancient times. In this epistle the writer quotes expressions as the real words of Christ, which are read as such in the gospels. He also alludes to Paul's epistles, and quotes the first to the Corinthians.
3. A book bearing the name of Hermas, who is mentioned by St. Paul, the antiquity of which is incontestible, being quoted by Irenæus, A. D. 178, Clement of Alexandria, A. D. 194, Tertullian, A. D. 200, Origen, A. D. 230. This work contains tacit allusions to St. Matthew's, St. Luke's, and St. John's gospels, and also to the acts.
4. Ignatius, who is said to have become Bishop of Antioch, about 37 years after Christ's ascension, and therefore, from his time, place, and station, probably had known and conversed with some of the apostles. Epistles of his are referred to by Polycarp his contemporary, and passages found in the epistles, now extant under his name, are quoted by Irenæus, A. D. 178, by Origen, A. D. 230, and the occasion of writing them, is given by Eusebius, and Jerome. In these epistles are undoubted allusions to the gospels of St. Matthew, and St. John ; Paul is spoken of in terms of high respect, and his epistles to the Ephesians is quoted by name.
5. Polycarp, had been taught by the apostles, and appointed Bishop of Smyrna, according to the testimony of Irenæus ;

Irenæus: we have but one undoubted epistle of his, and this though a short one, contains near forty clear allusions to the books of the New Testament, which is strong evidence of the respect which Christians of that age bore to them. The books alluded to, are the gospels of St. Matthew, and St. Luke, and many of St. Paul's epistles.

6. Papias, a hearer of John, and companion of Polycarp, in a passage quoted by Eusebius, from a work now lost, expressly ascribes the respective gospels, to Matthew, and Mark, not as a matter newly discovered, but as well known to all Christians.

7. Justin Martyr who lived about A. D. 140, quotes all the gospels, as *memoirs* composed by the apostles.

8. Not to notice many intermediate writers, Irenæus lived about A. D. 178. He has quoted the four gospels and acts, ascribing them to the person whose name they bore, and declaring there were no more than four. These writers lived in countries very remote from each other; Clement flourished at Rome, Ignatius at Antioch, Polycarp at Smyrna, Justin in Syria, and Irenæus in France.

9. Clement of Alexandria in Egypt, about A. D. 194, a very voluminous writer, repeatedly quotes the four gospels by the names of the writers, and the acts, as written by Luke.

10. Tertullian of Carthage in Africa, about A. D. 200, quotes all the books by name, and speaks of them as having been long received. It is observed, that in his small work, there are more quotations of scripture, than of all the works of Cicero, by writers of all characters, for several ages.

11. Origen, an Egyptian, A. D. 230, who mentions that the four gospels are received without dispute, by the whole church of God under heaven, and gives a history of their authors. The quotations in his works are so thickly sown, as to contain almost the whole text of the bible.

12. Cyprian Bishop of Carthage, A. D. 248, speaks of, and quotes all the gospels and the acts, many of Paul's epistles, and the first epistles of Peter and John.

13th,

13. Victorin Bishop of Pettau in Germany, A. D. 290, bears similar testimony.

14. Eusebius Bishop of Cæsaria, A. D. 315, composed an ecclesiastical history, and his testimony to the scriptures is, that of a man much conversant in the works of Christian authors, written during the three first centuries, and who had read many which are now lost. For sake of brevity, I have omitted many writers before Eusebius at different periods, supposing the testimony sufficiently strong, and for the same reason I shall not quote any after him, as their admission of the books will hardly be called in question. That so many men, at such a distance from each other, had conspired to cheat the world, is too improbable a supposition for any one seriously to adopt.

II. When the scriptures are quoted, or alluded to, they are quoted with peculiar respect, as books of a peculiar kind, as possessing an authority which belonged to no other books, and as conclusive in all questions and controversies amongst Christians. Besides the general strain of reference and quotation, which uniformly and strongly indicates this distinction, Theophilus of Antioch, about A. D. 181, calls them the *holy scriptures*; Origen says, we must receive the *scriptures* as witnesses; Cyprian calls them *the fountain* to which men should recur to find the truth, if it has been shaken; the Arians in the 4th century, reject certain expressions *because they were not in scripture*; and Athanasius their great antagonist, calls the books of the old and new Testament the *fountain of salvation*, besides others to the like purport.

III. The scriptures were in very early times collected into a distinct volume: as appears from various evidence, omitted for sake of brevity.

IV. Our present sacred writings, were soon distinguished by appropriate names and titles of respect. They were called *holy scriptures*, by Polycarp, A. D. 108, the histories were called *gospels*, by Justin Martyr, A. D. 140, they were called *scriptures of the Lord*, by Dionysius, A. D. 170, and afterwards by different writers, *divine oracles*, *evangelick writings*, *sacred books*, *new testament*, and other similar expressions, which are evidences of high and peculiar respect.

V. Our scriptures were publicly read and expounded, in the religious assemblies of the early Christians. This may be proved from the evidence of Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, and others.

VI. Commentaries were anciently written upon the scriptures; harmonies formed out of them; different copies carefully compared, and translations made of them into different languages. No greater proof can be given of the esteem in which they were held, than the industry bestowed upon them. And it should be observed, that their value consisted in their genuineness and truth, for as works of taste, they had nothing to recommend them. It likewise shows, they were *then* considered as ancient books; since men do not write comments upon publications of their own times. Now Tatian, a follower of Justin Martyr, and who flourished about the year 170, composed a harmony, or collation of the four gospels, which he called *Diateffaron*, of the four; Pantænus, a learned man of Alexandria, about twenty years after Tatian, wrote many commentaries about them; Clement of Alexandria wrote explications of many books of the old and new Testament; Tertullian appeals from the authority of a later version, to the *original Greek*; and many other eminent men in the third and fourth centuries, employed themselves in explaining and enforcing them. Of the ancient versions of the new Testament, the Syriack is one of the most valuable. Syriack was the language of Palestine, when Christianity was first established there. And although the books of scripture were written in Greek, for the purpose of a more extended circulation than within the precincts of Judea, yet it is probable, that they would soon be translated into the vulgar language of the country where the religion first prevailed. Such a translation we have in that language, bearing many internal marks of high antiquity, used by the Christians in Syria, and it differs in nothing material from our own.

VII. Our scriptures were received by ancient Christians of different sects and persuasions, by many Hereticks as well as Catholicks, and were usually appealed to in the controversies which arose in those days. In proof of this I shall mention Basilides, A. D. 120, or perhaps, sooner, who rejected the Jewish institution, not as spurious, but as proceeding from a being inferior to the true God; and who advanced a scheme of theology widely different from the general doctrine of the Christian

Christian church, and was warmly opposed by early Christian writers, yet there is positive evidence of his having received the gospel of Matthew, and there is no sufficient proof that he rejected any of the other three; and it appears also, that he wrote a very copious commentary upon the gospel. The Valentinians appeared about the same time. Heracleon, one of their sect, wrote commentaries on Luke and John, and Irenæus records, that they endeavoured to fetch arguments for their opinions, from the evangelick and apostolick writings. The Carpocratians are charged with endeavouring to *pervert* a passage in Matthew, which positively proves that they received that gospel; and their adversaries do not charge them with rejecting any part of the new Testament. Noetus, Paul of Samosata, Sabellius, Marcellus, Photinus, the Novatians, Donatists, Manicheans, besides Artemon, the Audians, the Arians, and divers others, all received most or all the same books of the new Testament which the Catholics received; and agreed in a like respect for them, as written by apostles, or their disciples and companions. Even Marcian, who rejected more, and appears to have been more violent than any other, admitted as much of St. Luke's gospel, as is necessary to authenticate the religion. But you may perhaps imagine (it is an objection which has been already urged to me) that we have no proof of what opinions the ancient hereticks held, since their writings are not come down to us, and we can only judge of them through the medium of their adversaries. Were we speaking of the characters, or even the religious tenets of these men, there would be some force in this objection, because we know that adversaries are very apt to exaggerate and misrepresent, in their zeal to maintain their own opinions. But in the present case it can be of no force, for the Catholick writers could have had no inducement to say, that the Hereticks received books of scripture as genuine, which they really did not receive; besides, the evidence is chiefly of the *indirect* kind, arising from charges made in the heat of debate, which is the least liable to suspicion. A familiar illustration may represent better to you the force of this evidence. In the year 1688, a revolution took place in Great Britain, William the third became king, in the stead of James the second, and a bill of rights was passed in favour of the people. References to this event, and the principles on which it was founded, occur frequently in the parliamentary debates of that, and succeeding reigns, and it is mentioned by some contemporary writers. At the distance of one hundred years,

years, disputes arose about the principles on which this event was founded, between Mr. Burke on one side, and Dr. Price, Mr. Mackintosh, &c. on the other; and each appealed to the writings of that day, in proof of their respective arguments.— Now suppose twelve or fifteen hundred years hence a doubt should arise whether there ever was a revolution and a bill of rights, it being suspected that the latter was a forgery of later times; and suppose also, that by the lapse of time and prevalence of contrary opinions, we knew nothing of Dr. Price's work, except from its being mentioned in a general history, and from Mr. Burke's remarks on it, but that the work of Mr. Burke happened to be preserved; let me ask you, in such a case, whether, though they might suspend their judgment about Dr. Price's character and principles, the people of that time, would not be justified in considering the passages quoted by Mr. Burke, as proofs that the Doctor admitted the truth of the event, and the genuineness of the writings which gave an account of it. Such is the evidence we derive from the *answers* to these ancient writers whose works are lost.

VIII. Our historical scriptures were attacked by the early adversaries of Christianity, as containing the accounts upon which the religion was founded.

About a hundred years after the publishing of the gospels, Celsus wrote a professed treatise against Christianity, and his testimony is therefore of importance. This work is lost; but an answer to it, about fifty years after by Origen, remains.— Origen appears to have given us the words of Celsus very faithfully, where he professes to give them, and he makes very large quotations. From these it appears, that Celsus had read the books we now have, for he quotes passages from them, with a view to expose them. These books must have been very publick, to have attracted the notice of an enemy so early; and it can hardly be supposed, that Origen was so very subtle as to forge objections to them, and abuse of the Christians, by an heathen, whose work could not be unknown at that time, and whose party was then prevalent, that he might confute it, and thus give weight to the evidence for Christianity in future times. This is too absurd for any one to suppose, and yet, it is what the rejection of Celsus's testimony would lead us to. Porphyry, a writer against Christianity in the third century, also made objections to passages in these books, and considered them as the depositaries of the

religion he attacked, which we learn from those who replied to them, for his work has also perished. The emperor Julian, was another great writer against Christianity, about a century after Porphyry, and it appears that he also knew of, and admitted the genuineness of these books; and when we consider how much it would have served their point to have denied it, and their means of information, their concession, or rather their suffrage, is extremely valuable.

IX. The four gospels, the acts of the apostles, thirteen epistles of Paul, the first epistle of John, and the first of Peter, were received without doubt, by those who doubted concerning the other books, which are contained in our present canon. This shows, that the authenticity of their books was a subject amongst the early Christians of consideration and enquiry; and that, where there was cause of doubt, they did doubt; a circumstance which strengthens very much their testimony to such books as were received by them with full acquiescence.

X. Formal catalogues of authentick scriptures were published; in *all* which, our present sacred histories were included.

XI. These propositions cannot be affirmed of any of those books, which are commonly called apocryphal books of the new Testament. I should have contented myself with laying this assertion before you, had not Mr. Paine insinuated, that the distinction between them was an arbitrary or accidental one, for so I understand the words he has made use of, and which I quoted at the beginning of this letter. As it is, I shall observe, that besides our gospels, and the acts of the apostles, no Christian history, claiming to be written by an apostle, or apostolical man, is quoted within three hundred years after the birth of Christ, by any writer now extant, or known, or which, if quoted, is not quoted with marks of censure and rejection. I copy this assertion from Archdeacon Paley, who made enquiry into it, and it is confirmed by the researches of Mr. Jones, and Doctor Lardner, men of great learning, who, in a manner, devoted their lives to the investigation of the credit due to ancient Christian writers, and whose critical skill rendered them as capable of judging, as their known integrity places them above all suspicion of willingly deceiving. To this I shall add, after the same author (from whom indeed the most, I may almost say, the whole
of

of this letter has been abridged) that there is no evidence of any spurious, or apocryphal books whatever having existed in the first century of the Christian æra, in which century, all our historical books are proved to have been extant; that these apocryphal writings were not read in the churches of Christians; were not admitted into their volume; do not appear in their catalogues; were not noticed by their adversaries; were not alledged by different parties, as of authority in their controversies; were not the subjects amongst them, of commentaries, translations, or expositions; finally, besides the silence of three centuries, or evidence within that time of their rejection, they were, with a consent nearly universal, reprobated by Christian writers of succeeding ages. I shall add, to what has been observed, that we may draw strong arguments of the genuineness of the scriptures, from the number of particular circumstances of time, place, persons, &c. mentioned in them; from the candour of the writers in relating their own faults, and those of their friends; and from their agreement with other histories, particularly that of Josephus. I have now, I think, brought evidence sufficient to satisfy you, that these books were written by the persons whose names they bear, or at least, in their age, and by persons who transmit the accounts which they taught. I am therefore entitled to use these books, as containing the evidence of these persons to the general facts which have been mentioned; and I shall consider myself as having established that Christ was the founder of the sect, and was crucified; that his disciples *said* he rose from the dead, and also that he wrought miracles, that they were persecuted on account of their opinions, and that they led moral lives agreeable to the gospel which they believed in.—Whether the extraordinary facts told by them, are true or false, is still to be considered; but I think myself authorised to assert, that if there were any forgery, or *pious fraud*, it was confined to the *first preachers*, and did not *knowingly* extend to the *second or third* before it was believed as true, which Mr. Paine supposes. That the writers I have mentioned, and the many others I could have mentioned, were concerned in the fraud, is a *libel* too unjust and unfounded to gain your attention.

LETTER X.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

I COME now to the most important enquiry, namely, are miracles credible proofs of a divine mission, and have we sufficient evidence to prove that miracles were wrought by Christ and his apostles, in confirmation of Christ having been sent by God? The first question which presents itself is, what is a miracle? *Mankind*, says Mr. Paine, *have conceived to themselves certain laws, by which, what they call nature, is supposed to act*;—and what led them to conceive this? Their having observed certain effects, uniformly to succeed certain causes, and certain events to certain previous circumstances; as for instance they observed that night regularly succeeded day, and day night; that in the life of man, infancy was the first stage, that to infancy, succeeded childhood; to childhood, youth; to youth, manhood, and old age; that death and dissolution finally took place, and that the grave was *a bourn from which no traveller returned*. They observed that a stone thrown into the air, always fell to the ground, and that iron, or other heavy bodies, if plunged into water, sank. This regular succession of events, was called the established course, and order of nature, the *secondary* causes of which, whether known or unknown, received the appellation of the *laws of nature*. Now *though the whole extent of those laws, and of what are commonly called the powers of nature*, be not perfectly known even to the most skilful and philosophical enquirer, yet there are parts of it which are obvious, even to the most superficial observer. The common experience of life will not permit man to be ignorant that a person really dead never returns to life again; I say *really*, because Mr. Paine has noticed persons *being to appearance dead*, and afterwards restored, but this deception can be of very short continuance, and only in particular cases. Nor is there any man so simple as to throw money into water in expectation of its swimming, or to think of trusting himself on the sea, in expectation of being able to walk on it, without sinking. That a heavy body sinks in a lighter one, and that what is once dead does not revive, are parts of the course of nature known to every one, and every one therefore can judge concerning a deviation from these parts of it, or any other in like manner coming under their observation. A miracle, then, is *something contrary to the operation and effect of those*

these laws; or as it has been better defined, a deviation from the established course of nature, whether the deviation be known to us or not. Miracles may consist either in changing the constituent parts of natural substances, as if water were to be changed into wine, or one metallick substance into another: or they may consist in controuling the operations of nature, as, if fire should not consume, or the sun not give heat; or in superceding the operations of natural causes, as for a man to speak suddenly a language before unknown to him. These are cases in which there can be no *legerdemain*, and they evidently fall under our definition of a miracle. It may be observed further, that every creature in the universe, as far as our observation extends, has a limited sphere of action, and it is reasonable to believe the same of all creatures however exalted in rank and dignity. Actions, performed with ease, by beings of one order cannot be performed without a miracle, by beings of a different order, even though of superior rank, in the creation. A bird can fly through the air, and by the curious mechanism of its frame, can rise or sink at pleasure; whilst man, who is so much wiser, so much more exalted in the scale of being, would in vain attempt it. If then any being, should at any time deviate from his proper sphere of action, this event would fall under the definition of a miracle, as for example, the appearance of an angel would be miraculous, because, we know it is not the proper sphere of such beings to appear to men, from the unusualness of the case. In like manner, the speaking of any other animal besides man, would be a miraculous event. Every sensible deviation from the *known* law, and course of nature, is then an evident miracle. I say from the *known* law, because however monstrous or extraordinary any event may appear, it cannot certainly be determined, to be miraculous till the course of nature is known. Mr. Paine has instanced a great number of things which might appear miraculous, such as the ascension of a man in an air-balloon, and others; but extraordinary as these would at first appear, there was no known established course of nature to the contrary, and on further enquiry, they could be satisfactorily accounted for. What he says of the *elephant and the mite*, is too trifling, I almost said, too ridiculous to be noticed. And as to *his performances by slight of hand*, I conceive they might have been omitted without injuring his arguments. Mr. Paine was writing against the miracles, asserted by Christians to have been wrought in support of their religion; unless he could show that they could be accounted for
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by natural causes, or by mechanical and optical deceptions, or by slight of hand, he gained nothing. A man rising from the dead on the third day, a man ascending up into heaven, the curing violent disorders by a word, the speaking suddenly in unknown languages, these, and such like cannot be so accounted for, and these are asserted as facts by all Christians. The point then is plainly this—Did these facts take place or not? if they did take place, then they must be confessed by all to be miracles: if not, then Christianity must be given up.—Having thus endeavoured to establish what is a miracle, namely, a sensible deviation from the *known* law and course of nature, I come next to observe, not only that God is *able* to work a miracle, which I imagine none of you will dispute, but also that they cannot be proved to be in all circumstances unworthy of his perfections. They are not contradictions, and therefore they are within the compass of omnipotence; nor are they inconsistent with infinite wisdom, if circumstances occur, which justify a divine interposition. They do not affect the immutability of God, for they might have been foreseen and intended from eternity, nor do they militate against infinite benevolence, if wrought to promote the good of his creatures. As to what Mr. Paine says, of its *being inconsistent to suppose the Almighty would make use of such means*, he founds it on his own supposition, that there is no proper criterion to judge of miracles, and therefore that the person performing them is liable to be esteemed an impostor, or the relator of them a liar, or the doctrines supported by them a fabulous invention. Now, I imagine you will allow, that there are things which are evident miracles, and that raising a dead man to life is such a thing: we have then a criterion, by which we may judge, namely, a contrariety to the *known* established course of nature; and if it be possible for God to perform a miracle, concerning which there can be no doubt, it is also possible for him to give it such evidence as to induce his creatures to believe in it. Before I proceed any farther, it may be useful to observe, that miracles never can be performed without an immediate divine interposition. The laws of nature, are indisputably the appointment of God; at least since I am reasoning only with believers in a God, as Mr. Paine himself professes to be, none of you will dispute it; it is therefore reasonable to conclude, that these laws cannot be suspended without his express commission and immediate authority. Nor have we any proper evidence of the truth of any miracles, unless it be of those of the Jewish and Christian dispensations, which claim God as their author. All others
have

have been satisfactorily shown by many writers, and particularly by the present Bishop of Salisbury, Dr. Douglas, in his *Criterion*, to be trifling, destitute of rational intention, calculated for some unworthy purpose, related by incompetent witnesses, and uncredited by all but the ignorant, and superstitious. God, who established the course of nature, is able to change or suspend it; that is, he can work miracles, but these miracles in themselves, will prove nothing more than the existence of a being capable of controuling the laws of nature. How then can they be brought in attestation of a doctrine? Let us examine—if I were to see a miracle wrought; if, for instance, I were to see a person whom I knew to have been dead, brought to life again, I should wonder, and admire the power of the Almighty, who was thus able to counteract the laws I see universally established, but this is all the effect it would produce on me. Were however, a person to make his appearance, to assert publicly that he was a teacher sent from God, and to appeal to a train of *clear* and *acknowledged* miracles, wrought in an open and publick manner, in attestation of his claim; I should consider this to be a sufficient proof of the truth of his doctrine, and of his divine mission; and I should do so, because no such miracles could be wrought, but by an immediate divine interposition; because, a wise, true, and good being, as we have abundant proof that God is, would never suffer the laws of nature to be violated, or suspended in attestation of a falsehood, and of course the doctrine so attested, must be of divine original.—We have then got thus far—there are cases in which miracles may be fully ascertained, and if fully ascertained, there are cases in which they will be *certain* proofs of the truth of a doctrine, or the divine mission of a prophet. But is it not improbable that God would enable any person to work such miracles? Not more so, than that he should communicate a revelation to mankind; for if he see sufficient reason for making such communication, there will be like reason for using some means to convince them that it came from him; and what reason have we to say miracles are an improper means? or if God chuse to adopt that mode, shall we presume to reject it? Miracles either of knowledge or power, are the only means of which we can conceive, by which a divine revelation may be confirmed, nor has Mr. Paine, nor any other objector to miracles, ever pretended to point out a better, but have gone on the supposition, that a revelation was not *necessary*, if they did not even strike at the *possibility* of it—Miracles have several advantages,

vantages ; they are well suited to revive the principles of natural religion, by proving the existence of a Being superior to the laws of nature, and capable of controuling its course ; they are means of proof which are equally obvious and satisfactory to the learned and the ignorant, to the philosopher and the peasant ; and being *facts*, they are proofs capable of being transmitted by testimony to distant ages and nations. I have had repeated occasion to remark the unfounded hypotheses which Mr. Paine has advanced ; on the present subject, he argues *that miracles are improbable, because they would not answer any useful purpose, even if they were true ; for it is more difficult to obtain belief to a miracle, than to a principle evidently moral, without any miracle.* The reason is, because *moral principle speaks universally for itself*, whereas, *a miracle can be but a thing of a moment, and seen but by a few ; and after this depends on report.* And in another place, *miracles imply a lameness or weakness in the doctrine that is preached, and it degrades the Almighty into the character of a showman, playing tricks to make the people stare and wonder.*—The foundation of all this is, that men are capable, by reason alone, of attaining a knowledge of their duty, and that they have such a sense of morality, and are so ready to attend to it, that they require no stronger inducements than its own intrinsic excellence. Now this I imagine is contrary to fact and experience. That men have not employed their reason so well, but have required something more than the light of nature to instruct them, I have already endeavoured, and I hope successfully, to establish. If reason then is not all-sufficient, how is it degrading to the Almighty, to suspend or alter the laws he has established in nature, for the purpose of enforcing the communication of useful knowledge to his people ? Or how does it imply any weakness in a doctrine, to be confirmed of divine origin by works which none could perform without divine aid, and which are calculated to rouse men from their lethargy, and render them attentive and submissive ? But Mr. Paine's grand objection, is, that it is *equivocal evidence, for the thing is not to depend upon the thing called a miracle, but upon the credit of the reporter, who says that he saw it.* If we see an account given of a miracle by the person who said he saw it, it raises a question in the mind very easily decided, which is, *is it more probable that nature should go out of her course, or that a man should tell a lie ? We have never seen, in our time, nature go out of her course, but we have good reason to believe, that millions of lies have been told in the same time ?*

It is therefore at least, millions to one, that the reporter of a miracle tells a lie. The amount of this is, that no testimony whatever can make a miracle credible, because it is contrary to uniform and universal experience. We have known men tell lies, but we have never known nature go out of her course. This is Mr. Hume's objection, and it will be necessary to give it close attention. And in the first place I would remark, that to assert miracles are contrary to universal experience, is evidently begging the question, and assuming as proved, the subject of the controversy. We say that miracles took place; it is replied, they never did; and why? Because they never did. But suppose, that Mr. Paine does not mean *universal* experience, and confines it only to *our own*, *we have never seen nature go out of her course*; is there any contradiction in our not having done so? Or is it necessary, that if God once saw fit to suspend or alter the laws of nature, that he should do it frequently, and that instances of it, should fall within *our* experience? If indeed a fact is related to have existed at a time and place, at which time, and place we being present, did not perceive it to exist; in this case, there is a contrariety which no evidence can surmount; but this cannot extend to past times, nor can we reasonably conclude, that because a thing does not happen now, it never took place. "It is not like alledging a new law of nature, or a new experiment in natural philosophy, because, when these are related, it is expected that under the same circumstances, the same effect will follow universally; and in proportion as this expectation is justly entertained, the want of a corresponding experience negatives the history. But to expect concerning a miracle that it should succeed upon repetition, is to expect that which would make it cease to be a miracle, which is contrary to its nature as such, and would totally destroy the use and purpose for which it was wrought. The force of experience as an objection to miracles is founded in the presumption, either that the course of nature is invariable, or that, if it be ever varied, variations will be frequent and general. Has the necessity of this alternative been demonstrated? Permit me to call the course of nature the agency of an intelligent being, and is there any good reason for judging this state of the case to be probable? Ought we not rather to expect, that such a Being, upon occasions of peculiar importance, may interrupt the order which he had appointed, yet, that such occasions should return seldom; that these interruptions consequently should be confined to

“ the experience of a few ; that the want of it, therefore, in
 “ many, should be matter neither of surprise, nor objection?”
 Mr. Paine tells us *we have good reason to believe that millions of
 lies have been told*, and that therefore it is more probable a
 man should tell a lie, than that nature should go out of her
 course, which we have never seen. But though we may have
 experience of men’s telling lies, have we had experience of
 their telling lies without any interested motive, and of their
 suffering death rather than give up the assertion of this lie ?
 This is, I believe, a case no more within our experience than
 the working of a miracle, and might indeed be considered as
 a miracle. Admitting therefore, that the credibility of testi-
 mony depends entirely upon our experience of its truth in
 given circumstances ; admitting that facts, varying from uni-
 form experience, especially those which imply a deviation
 from the established laws of nature, and perhaps most of all,
 miracles said to be wrought in proof of any religion, ought
 not to be believed but with the greatest caution, and upon the
 strongest evidence ; admitting even, with Mr. Hume, that
 no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the tes-
 timony be of such a kind, that the falsehood of it would be
 more miraculous than the event it endeavours to establish ;
 even on these grounds, I think, it may be shown that the re-
 porters of the miracles of Christianity, ought not to be sus-
 pected by Mr. Paine or others of having *told a lie* to impose
 upon the world. “ When a theorem is proposed to a ma-
 “ thematician,” observes an ingenious writer, often quoted in
 these letters, “ the first thing he does with it, is to try it upon
 “ a simple case ; and, if it produce a false result, he is sure
 “ that there must be some mistake in the demonstration.”—
 With his assistance then, let us proceed to try what he has
 called Mr. Hume’s, and what I may call Mr. Paine’s theorem.
 If twelve men, whose probity and good sense any of you had
 long known, should seriously and circumstantially relate to
 you an account of a miracle wrought before their eyes, and
 in which it was impossible that they should be deceived ; if the
 governor of the country, hearing a rumour of this account,
 should call these men into his presence, and offer them a short
 proposal, either to confess the imposture, or submit to be tied
 up to a gibbet : if they should refuse with one voice to ac-
 knowledge that there existed any falsehood or imposture in the
 case ; if this threat were communicated to them separately,
 yet with no different effect ; if it was at last executed ; if you
 yourselves saw them one after another consenting to be wrack-
 ed,

ed, burnt, or strangled, rather than give up the truth of their account, still according to Mr. Paine's rule, you ought not to give credit to them; because you have had *reason to believe* men have told lies, *but you have never seen nature go out of her course*. Could you, could any man, could even Mr. Paine himself, resist such evidence? I will venture to assert, that neither he, nor any other man would reject such evidence on any other subject; but unfortunately, there is such a desire to be freed even from the mild and gentle yoke of Christianity, though this yoke is the truest liberty, that men will often shut their eyes wilfully against the truth, and cannot be convinced, not because the evidence is weak, but because they don't chuse to admit it, be it ever so strong. On such men all argument is lost, and it is the best way to leave them to the misery, which will sooner or later attend such opinions, and which they by such conduct, draw down upon themselves. I pretend not to judge any man, or to say this is the case of any particular individual, but I much fear, that unbelievers in general, are more actuated by a desire of finding Christianity false, than they are willing to acknowledge even to their own hearts, and there is surely nothing uncharitable in believing that where this desire, and not a pure love of truth, has led any man to reject a revelation which came from God, (supposing Christianity to be such) his conduct must be displeasing to God, who mercifully gave that revelation for *his* benefit, as well as for that of others.

From what I have said in this letter, you will perceive that I intend to lay much stress upon the sufferings of the first Christians, in consequence of their adherence to their testimony. It has been objected to me that this is no proof, because that we have instances of many men suffering for very opposite opinions, which could not both of them be true, and the Romish and Protestant sufferers in the reigns of Henry the eighth, and Mary the first, have been particularly quoted. To this objection I answer, that there is a very great difference in adhering to opinions, and to facts. In the former, a man may be mistaken, in the latter, he cannot. If I believe in any doctrine, and chuse to die rather than give it up, it is a proof that I really believed it, but not that my belief was well founded; but if I say, that I saw a man alive, whom I knew before to have been dead and buried, and persist in asserting this, even so as to loose my life in consequence of it,

it is a proof not only that I believe it, but that it took place, supposing me to have the use of my eyes, and to have been sufficiently acquainted with the man. This distinction ought to be considered, and if it be, the objection I mentioned can have no weight.

Having thus endeavoured to explain what a miracle is, and to show that there is a criterion by which we may distinguish miracles, and also to show the fallacy of some general arguments urged against the credibility of them, I shall in the next letter, apply the whole to the miracles of Christianity, and more particularly to the resurrection, because as there is the fullest evidence to this, so, if it be once established, there will, I imagine, be no difficulty in admitting the rest on the testimony of the gospel historians. If one miracle was wrought, there might as well have been a hundred, and the divine mission of Christ being once proved, his disciples and the first preachers of his religion, will scarcely be suspected of deceit.

LETTER

LETTER XI.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

AFTER what has been advanced in the preceding letters, I conceive none of you will dispute that the disciples of Jesus Christ, asserted him to have been a person having a divine commission ; that they spoke of him *as a man approved of God, by miracles and wonders and signs which God did by him*, and that after *his being crucified and slain, God raised him up, having loosed the pains of death.*—Acts ii, 22, 23. This was the fact to which his disciples continually appealed, and unless it really took place, they were either knaves or fools ; for it has been sufficiently established, that it was not the invention of a later period than that in which *the men called apostles*, must have lived. And 1. in the first place, let it be remembered, that the fact is not impossible, God being the supposed author of it ; nor is it even highly improbable, when we consider what an important end was to be answered by it. And without mentioning other ends, on which Christians of different opinions would enlarge in a different manner, supposing that God designed to give his creatures the fullest persuasion, the *most lively hope* of a resurrection from the dead, what more satisfactory method could he take than by making the preacher of that doctrine both a proof and a pattern of it ? If then it was not improbable that God should acquaint mankind that he designed them for a future state, neither was it highly improbable that he should use such means of confirming their belief in it. 2. We have the testimony of four historians, two of whom were apostles, and companions of this Jesus, and who had every opportunity of being well informed, and the other two were contemporaries, early converts to his religion, and in all probability companions of his apostles : these writers not only mention a train of miracles wrought by Jesus, to which he repeatedly appealed, as proofs of his being sent from God ; but they all agree, that in consequence of this assumption of divine authority, he was taken by the Jews, and being prosecuted before the Roman governor, was crucified in the most open and publick manner, between two malefactors ; they state, that when *perfectly* dead (of which the soldiers had such proof as to refrain from breaking his legs, and to prevent any doubt of which one of them pierced him in the side with his spear) he was taken down and was buried in a sepulchre.

a sepulchre adjoining ; that the Jews having a suspicion of his disciples carrying away the body, procured a guard of Roman soldiers to be placed on the sepulchre, after having rolled a great stone to the mouth of it and sealed it up : that, on the morning of the third day, when some women who had attended on his preaching, went to his tomb to show their respect by anointing his body, it was no longer there ; that in the course of that day he appeared to Mary Magdalene, to Peter, to two disciples walking to Emmaus, and to ten of his apostles, who were assembled in the evening at Jerusalem ; that he appeared afterwards to the eleven apostles on the succeeding first day of the week, and satisfied Thomas, by suffering him to handle and examine the wounds which had been made by his crucifixion ; that he appeared to several of them at the sea of Galilee ; and that after having been forty days on earth, he ascended up into heaven in their presence ; Paul mentions his having appeared to five hundred of them at one time, and there were probably many other conversations with them, which his disciples have not recorded. 3. Luke one of these historians of Jesus, in a work professedly a continuation of the history, mentions, that his apostles preached this doctrine publicly in Jerusalem, and were punished on that account, and he also mentions, that Paul a young man who was a violent persecutor of the disciples, was converted, by a personal appearance of Christ to him, in consequence of which from an enemy, he became a zealous preacher of Christianity, and bore testimony to the resurrection and the other facts on which it is founded.* And the writings of Paul also testify his conversion, and his subsequent belief, in consequence of having seen Christ. 4. This testimony is borne by men who had the best means of knowing the truth of what they relate, and whom we have no reason to regard in any other light than as true and faithful historians. We have, it is true, no account of the resurrection except from his disciples, nor could it be expected, since all who would acknowledge this fact would become disciples. 5. The story itself, so far from *having every mark of fraud and imposition*, on the contrary, has every internal mark of a true relation.

* Lord Littleton has argued the truth of Christianity, in a very ingenious and striking manner, from this conversion of St. Paul, and his work is more valuable as there is reason for believing that they were arguments which convinced himself of its truth, and induced him to quit the ranks of deism.

tion. The different persons who relate it, do so in a different manner, dwelling on different circumstances, and varying in some minute particulars; which would not be the case in a settled plan to deceive. Nor would men, who were desirous of imposing a forgery on the world, have mentioned the suspicion of the Jews, and the charge afterwards made by them, that the body of Jesus was stolen by his disciples; nor would they have recorded the doubt of Thomas; it is indeed as contrary to every idea which can be formed of a story made to deceive, as can well be imagined. 6. According to the accounts of these historians, there were twelve men, (including Matthias, who is spoken of as a person present, Acts i, 22,) and probably some hundreds, who saw Jesus after his resurrection, who had an opportunity of handling him, who saw him eat and drink, who frequently conversed with him, and afterwards saw him ascend into heaven. And the characters of these men, if we may judge from circumstances, (for there is no *praise* of them,) were those of upright, honest men, who would have no desire of imposing on their fellow-creatures. 7. We are further told, that these men adhered in their testimony to this event, notwithstanding the threats of those who had procured the death of their master, that they endured scourgings and imprisonments rather than give up the *publick* declaration of what they had seen, and hazarded every thing which men generally hold most dear. 8. These men are themselves said to have wrought many extraordinary miracles in proof of the more private one of the resurrection, and they made many converts amongst the people of Jerusalem, who had every opportunity of examining into the truth of what they said. 9. In consequence of Christ's resurrection, they assembled together on the *first* day of the week, which was the cause of the change from saturday the Jewish sabbath, to sunday; and they ate and drank together on that day, in commemoration of the events attendant upon his death; customs which remain to the present day, and are observed by Christians of almost every religious persuasion. 10. They not only wrought miracles themselves, but they communicated miraculous gifts to their proselytes. 11. That the early Christians believed these facts, and that they sacrificed every thing men generally hold dear to the profession of a religion founded upon these events is unquestionable, as it appears from the testimony of enemies as well as from that of friends. 12. The Christian religion was not propagated by those means by which false religions have usually made their way:
neither

neither by civil policy, nor by military force, nor by priestly influence and fraud, nor by the aid of learning, and philosophy, nor by vulgar prejudice, nor by accommodation to the vices, and corrupt inclinations of mankind. Nay, it is most apparent that all these circumstances combined against it, and yet Christianity prevailed in opposition to every obstacle which was thrown in its way; it completely overthrew polytheism in the course of a few centuries, established itself in the world and continues to this day. 13. No motive can possibly be assigned which should induce these men, to have invented so foolish and wicked a fraud, and to have persevered in maintaining it. It was not the means of attaining ease or honour, or opulence, or fame. When detected, they could expect nothing but to be exposed to infamy and ruin; and had the facts on which it was founded been false, they might easily have been disproved; it was the interest, and wish of numbers to have confuted them; nor would it have been possible to have made a single convert of any person in possession of his senses, by a fable so palpably false and incredible; yet it appears that thousands were converted to Christianity, in the very place where these events are said to have happened, and within a very few days after the time in which they are said to have taken place. 14. If you admit the resurrection of Christ, and the other facts recorded, you have an easy and adequate solution of the early, rapid, and extensive progress of the Christian religion, notwithstanding the obstacles opposed to it, a progress which is evident even from heathen writers;—whereas if you deny these facts, you can assign no probable, or even possible cause for a conduct so absurd, unnatural, and unaccountable, so irreconcilable to the principles of human nature, and to historical evidence.

*Whence but from Heaven, could men unskilled in arts,
In different nations born, in different parts,
Weave such agreeing truths? or how, or why,
Should all conspire to cheat us with a lie?
Unasked their pains, ungrateful their advice,
Starving their gains, and martyrdom their price?*

DRYDEN.

Let us now suppose, that the first teachers of Christianity were either deceived themselves, or intended to deceive others. The former has been held by some; the latter is Mr. Paine's opinion.

opinion. According to the former supposition, the first teachers of Christianity were *pious enthusiasts*, who followed, about the country of Judea, a man, whom they believed to have had divine communications, and who told them that it was necessary for him to be put to death; they *imagined* that they saw several miraculous cures; that dead persons were brought to life; that thousands were fed by a few loaves, with many other similar events; when this man, whom they called *master*, was put to death in the most disgraceful manner, and all their hopes were at an end, they *took it into their heads*, that his body was not to be found where they had buried it, but that he had been raised from the dead; they *fancied* that they saw him several times in the course of forty days, that they conversed with him, handled him, ate with him, and afterwards saw him ascend into heaven; they *imagined*, that after the ascension of their master, divine power was communicated to themselves, and that it was their duty to go about preaching to all people, and testifying what they had seen and heard at the risk of their lives; and they not only *imagined* these things themselves, but they induced others to *imagine* the same, and to profess their belief in it at the same hazard; their converts *fancied* that they saw lame men walk, and sick men made perfectly well, in consequence of a command, and these sick persons also *imagined* that these cures were effected; men of different nations *fancied* that they heard illiterate Jewish fishermen speak to them in their own respective languages, when it was all the time an unintelligible jargon; and what perhaps is most unaccountable of all, the Jews who had taken such care to guard the dead body of Jesus, and who used all their exertions to prevent these *enthusiasts* from preaching, never resorted to that easy and simple proof, of producing the body, which they must have had in their power, since we are now supposing the apostles to be *enthusiasts*, and not rogues. Many are the instances we have had of heated imaginations, but never was there a case in which the senses of men were so grossly, so unaccountably imposed upon, as were those of the apostles, and their converts on this supposition. You will hardly believe me, when I tell you that there have been men, men who would be thought *philosophers*, and certainly were *learned*, who were credulous enough to believe that thousands of men took it into their heads without any reason at all, that Christ, and his apostles really wrought miracles; that they madly devoted their labour, their fortunes, and even their lives to the propagation of this groundless opinion, and that by their in-

flexible zeal and obstinacy, they forced the belief of it upon the rest of the world. Is not such enthusiasm as this, more strange, and unaccountable than a resurrection from the dead?

The apostles however, objects Mr. Paine, were impostors and wished to establish a *pious fraud*. What follows from this supposition? That a few ignorant, illiterate men, living in Galilee, the most obscure, and disreputable part of Judea, which was itself thought very meanly of by most other nations, that a few ignorant men of this country, fishermen, or in equally low stations, took upon themselves the task of reforming the worship and manners of the world by the means of imposture; that they took as their master, one Jesus, a carpenter and their own countryman, who had from benevolent intentions preached such strict morality, and had so severely inveighed against the vices of his countrymen, especially those in high stations, that he had been publicly executed (you will recollect that Mr. Paine acquits Jesus of all concern with the imposture, on what grounds I cannot well imagine;) that they stole his body from the sepulchre, and pretended he had risen from the dead; that they made this event the foundation of their system, although they knew *that Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling block, and to all the gentiles foolishness*; that their object in this *pious fraud*, was to overturn polytheism, and introduce the worship of the one true God, and to promote universal benevolence, piety, and virtue; that they pretended to the power of working miracles, and speaking in different languages, and that they openly attempted these without fear of discovery, and without having ever been detected; that so attached were they to this fraud of their own invention, that they persisted in it at the risk of every thing dear to men; that many of them died in attestation of it, and that they prevailed on others to do the same; that they persuaded a considerable number of persons, not in Judæa only, but throughout the Roman empire, to believe them, to forsake their old religion, to adopt a new one under great worldly disadvantages, and to lead lives suitable to their profession; that such was the number of these converts as, in a very short time, to occasion a desertion of the heathen temples, and to draw down upon them the vengeance of Roman emperors; that these ignorant fishermen contrived such a story as could not be proved a forgery, either in Jerusalem where the scene was laid, or elsewhere, although many of the facts appealed to, were of a publick nature; that, with such an
origin,

origin, this imposture, improbable, as we are told, in itself, and *with every mark of fraud stamped upon the face of it*, and teaching a new, unpopular, and unaccommodating religion, made a rapid progress in an enlightened age and country, in opposition to the prejudices, vices, interests, and inclinations of mankind, and to the authority and influence of the magistrate, the priest, the philosopher, and the illiterate multitude; that this imposture has also escaped the detection of men of sense and ability, the most enlightened and diligent enquirers after truth, until the present day; and finally, that after having so long and so successfully imposed upon a very great part of the world, this fraud has at length been detected, not by testimony to show that such events as were pretended did not happen, but by denying that miracles are capable of proof, because we have never seen any, and by asserting that we ought to have *ocular and manual demonstration*. Such is what Mr. Paine would have you believe; but as you don't experience that men act in such a strange manner, you will probably be of opinion, that to suppose multitudes of men in their sober senses, to have acted thus contrary to every motive which we observe to influence the human breast, you will imagine this, I say, more incredible, more contrary to the course of nature, and consequently more *miraculous*, than for the events to be true, which are alledged as proofs of the divine authority of the gospel. I have now I hope satisfactorily shown what a weight of evidence is in support of our Lord's resurrection, and what absurdities would follow from the supposition of its being a pious fraud, or the dream of enthusiasts; there are one or two circumstances however mentioned by Mr. Paine, which I shall briefly notice. He objects to there not being more *equal and universal* evidence of the fact. What was quoted from Archdeacon Paley respecting optimism, might be again urged here, but I would add, that if the evidence had been satisfactory to all the people of Judæa, so that they could not have helped believing in it, it would then probably have been said by Mr. Paine, and other *reasonable* men of the present day, that it was all a collusion, tending to exalt the Jewish nation, whereas now, the Jews are a *surviving evidence*, that there was no collusion, but that from their enmity they would have detected the imposture if it had been in their power. Besides it would have weakened the evidence derived from the opposition given to it from all quarters. But the Jews *say it is false*; true, and they say that his apostles stole the body of Jesus. But is this probable? Is it likely that a guard of *Roman*

soldiers should all fall asleep, and continue so, whilst a very large stone was rolled away, and a body removed? Would they not have been severely punished, if this had been the case? Is it not more probable that they were bribed to say the body was stolen, and that they were protected from punishment by the influence of the chief priests: And supposing the disciples had the body, what could they do with it? It will hardly be imagined, that in such circumstances he was brought to life again by natural means, and we have already seen what improbabilities follow from the supposition of deceit in the first Christians. Some variations in the account are often objected; I have no doubt that these may be reconciled to a very great degree, but it will take up more time than is consistent with my present design. I will therefore conclude this letter, hoping enough has been said to convince you without *ocular and manual demonstration* which you cannot have, that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and is consequently to be considered as a divine teacher, both he and his apostles having appealed to this and other miracles as proofs of his being so. Having admitted one miracle, you can have no reasonable objection to receive others on the authority of such competent witnesses as the writers of the new Testament, and finally admitting the divine character of Jesus, and the consequent mission of his apostles, you will readily receive the writings which contain the history of his life, and an account of his doctrines, as containing an account of a revelation from God, and as therefore deserving the honourable appellation of the *word of God*, and to these writings you will naturally resort, for the best and most genuine account of what was taught by your divine master and his apostles.

LETTER

LETTER XII.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

HAVING now accomplished the most material part of my object, and having already taken up more of your time than I at first intended to have done, I shall very briefly notice the other subjects I proposed to discuss. The next of these in order is, whether there can be such a thing as prophecy; in what circumstances we may regard prophecies as proofs of a divine mission; and whether we have any evidence from prophecies in the new Testament of the truth of Christianity?

Prophecy may be defined, a supernatural prediction of a future event; and those persons who believe, that the Almighty Maker of all things is acquainted with what will come to pass, as well as with what has already taken place in this world, which he has created, those persons, I say, who admit fore-knowledge in God himself, must also admit that, if he pleases, he can communicate to his creatures an account of future events, either for the purpose of giving them consolation under affliction, of warning them of the dangers in which they are placed, or of affording them evidence of the truth of a divine revelation. For one or other of these purposes, and sometimes for all of them, it seems to have pleased the Almighty, to have communicated the power of prophecy to many men amongst the Jews; at least if the Jewish and Christian histories be true, there were men who laid claim to this power, and whose prophecies have been handed down to our times. The word *prophet*, however does not *always* signify in scripture a *foreteller of future events*, nor is it confined to one sense, as Mr. Paine might have known, if he had not disdained the labour of enquiry. It *bolted* into Mr. Paine's mind, from the connection the word sometimes has with musical instruments, that *prophet* must have meant poet or musician, *he treated this voluntary visitor with civility*, and applied it to the explanation of Saul's prophesying; he thought it removed the difficulty, and he *entertained* it, never reflecting that the word might have many significations; he then tried, to select a few lines in measure, and being himself a *poet* tacked together a few couplets. After this he recollected that the *prophets* were divided generally into the greater and lesser; this appeared very strange to him; there could be no degrees
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in the power of foretelling events; one must have been as great as the other; and as the very natural thought that they were so called from the *size* of their books, never occurred to him, he set this down as a further proof, that they were mere poets. Such is the *convincing* argument, by which Mr. Paine has *put the ax to the root* of prophecy, as he himself confidently expresses it, and has rendered *all the inferences drawn from them, all the respect paid to them, and all the commentaries written upon them, not worth disputing about*. I should think it an insult to your understandings, to offer a serious refutation of such an argument. Some other objections which he has made (being determined, I suppose, to clinch the matter) are however calculated to mislead you. He has said, that *all the things called prophecies, in the book called the bible, are related in such a loose and obscure manner, as to be out of the comprehension of those that heard them, and so equivocal as to fit almost any circumstance that might happen afterwards; that every thing unintelligible was prophetic, that it was deemed sufficient if the supposed prophet in shooting with a long bow of a thousand years, struck within a thousand miles of a mark; and that even if prophecies were real, they could not answer the purpose of proving a divine mission*. The method I shall take of refuting these assertions, will be by pointing out to you some instances of clear and intelligible prophecies which have been fulfilled, but I shall previously remark with Doctor Priestley, that "it is not necessary the event should correspond to the prophecy so exactly, as that it might have been distinctly described before it came to pass. For in how dark and obscure a manner soever, the prophecy be expressed, it will be sufficiently manifest that it came from God, if, after the event, the correspondence between them be so great, that human foresight could not have described it in such a manner, and if it be highly improbable, or impossible that it should have been described in such a manner at random. But many prophecies recorded in scripture were as intelligible before as after the event, and yet did not at all contribute to their own accomplishment, by inducing the friends of revelation to exert themselves in order to bring about the thing foretold." The criterion by which we distinguish a prophecy to be of divine original is, its having been delivered before the event; and the event being beyond the reach of human sagacity and sufficiently correspondent to the prediction. Such prophecies after their accomplishment, and such only can afford us any proof of the divine mission of the person

son who delivers them, and such we contend corroborate the evidence of the truth of the Jewish and Christian revelations. I would further observe, that prophecies never were appealed to as proofs of a divine mission, to the persons who heard them delivered, unless they also witnessed the accomplishment of them. Those persons had usually other proofs of the authority of the prophet, and the predictions answered the other ends I have already mentioned, either of consoling them, or warning them, as most of those to the Israelites, or of giving them *signs* to direct them, as was that of Christ respecting Jerusalem. Their value as proofs of a mission, is to those who live at or after the time of their fulfilment, and then, if the event were beyond the reach of human sagacity, and sufficiently correspondent to the prediction, we may fairly conclude that it came from God. Christians appeal to prophecies, as proofs of the divine mission of their master in two ways, showing that prophecies were fulfilled in him, which were delivered previous to his appearance, and that prophecies which were delivered by him, have been fulfilled. The former will be noticed when we consider the Jewish prophecies, and to a few of the latter I will now refer you. All of you, who read or hear the new testament, must recollect various minute circumstances relating to his own future situation foretold by Christ, and especially the particulars of his death and resurrection. You must also recollect the prophecy respecting the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, and the calamities to be endured by the Jews, which occur, Mat. xxiii. 37, 38. Luke xix. 41. &c. xxiii. 27. &c. and most fully, Mat. xxiv. and Luke xx. The accomplishment of them will be very evident on perusing Josephus's *History of the Wars of the Jews*. I will mention one particular circumstance: Jesus was with his disciples at a place whence they could see the temple, and they desired him to attend to the magnificence of the temple; he answered, *see ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down*. This is related by an historian whose fidelity we have no cause to suspect, and whose work we have reason to think was published before the event; when it was delivered Judea was in peaceable subjection to the Romans, the most powerful nation in the world, and though they bore the yoke with impatience, there was no probability of their being soon able to make opposition, or at least such as would occasion a long siege; and even if this had been probable, it could not be expected

pected that a people so much attached to the fine arts, would destroy so glorious a structure as the temple was. The event then was beyond the reach of human sagacity, yet Christ said it would happen before *that generation had passed away*. His prediction was fulfilled; the Jews with astonishing obstinacy defended their city; and notwithstanding the desire of the Roman general to preserve it, the temple was set on fire and completely destroyed. Another prophecy to which I shall call your attention, occurs in the two following parables: *the kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard-seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree; so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof. The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.* Matt. xiii. 31, 33. This prophecy was delivered in parables, which was the usual way of speaking amongst all the eastern nations. There is however nothing obscure in it; by the *kingdom of heaven*, the gospel is intended, as appears from other passages, and the similitudes made use of, are such as would strike every person who heard them. At the time they were delivered, and also when they were recorded by Matthew, there was equal improbability, in the eyes of men, of the event taking place which was foretold: the first preachers were illiterate men, of low birth, and of a despised nation, and the doctrines were such as would occasion strong opposition from every quarter; yet notwithstanding every obstacle, Christianity *has* proceeded in the *gradual* manner so clearly implied by *the growth of a plant*, and *the working of leaven*, and the prediction is now going on rapidly to its perfect accomplishment. I might lay before you some others, and I have no doubt that the manifest accomplishment of some in that *book of riddles*, *the revelations*, will furnish additional ones to our posterity; those, however, I have mentioned will answer my present design, and serve to strengthen your belief in the divine original of Christianity, though, perhaps, not of themselves sufficient to convince you.

LETTER

LETTER XIII.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

MR. PAINE has said a great deal against the Jewish scriptures, which I have no intention to examine, because I do not regard it as affecting the main object of these letters, which was to prove the truth of Christianity not of Judaism. It has been the fashion to attack Christianity through the sides of Judaism, but though these objections are founded chiefly in misconstruction or exaggeration, it is not incumbent upon the defender of Christianity as such, to maintain the circumstantial truth of each separate passage of the old testament, the genuineness of every book, or the information, fidelity, and judgment of every writer in it; nor would the foundations of our religion be at all weakened, even though we gave up the speaking of Balaam's ass, or the stories of Samson and Jonah, although these stories do not strike me in the same light they do Mr. Paine. Having premised this, I shall content myself with selecting a few passages from Doctor Priestley's letters to a philosophical unbeliever, respecting the truth of the Mosaic dispensation. "It has been the custom," says he, "with unbelievers, to divert themselves and their readers with the history of the Jews, with some of the peculiarities of their religion, and especially with their stupidity, obstinacy, and ignorance, compared with the more polished nations of antiquity. But it has been without considering that all these latter charges are highly unfavourable to their own object in advancing them, if it be admitted (which cannot surely be denied) that Jews, stupid and ignorant as they have been, were nevertheless men, and not a species of beings totally different from that of other men. For it is obvious to remark, that so obstinate and intractable as unbelievers describe them to have been, (as indeed their own history shews that they were) it must have been peculiarly difficult to impose upon them, with respect to any thing to which they were exceedingly averse. Also, from a people so unpolished and ignorant, so far behind other nations in the arts of peace and war, we should not naturally expect doctrines and sentiments superior to any thing of the kind that we find in the most improved nations. And yet, the bare inspection of their writings proves, that with respect to religion and the doctrines concerning God and providence, the Jews were in a high degree knowing,

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“ and all other nations ignorant and barbarous.* In these
 “ respects, therefore the Jews must have been possessed of
 “ advantages superior to those of other nations; and if these
 “ advantages were not *natural*, they must have been of a su-
 “ pernatural kind. It must be allowed as a striking fact, that
 “ the Jewish religion was most essentially different from that
 “ of any other nation in the world.—The *object of their wor-*
 “ *ship* was quite different, and infinitely superior to any thing
 “ that other nations looked up to. Also what we may call the
 “ *morality* of their worship, the character of the rites of it,
 “ and the temper and disposition of mind promoted by it,
 “ were still more different. In all these essential particulars,
 “ the religion of Jesus was so strikingly different from that of
 “ any of their neighbouring nations, that it could never have
 “ been derived from any of them, and an attachment to the
 “ one must have created an aversion to the other.—As the
 “ Jews, though an ancient nation, were not so ancient as the
 “ Egyptians or other nations by whom they were completely
 “ surrounded, and as, with respect to natural science, it is
 “ acknowledged that they were much behind them, how
 “ came they possessed of such just and sublime concep-
 “ tions, with respect to the subject of *religion*, and of
 “ whom could they have learned such rational worship?
 “ This effect, as well as every other, must have had an
 “ adequate cause, and the circumstances of the Jews con-
 “ sidered, I see no adequate cause of so great an effect
 “ besides those divine communications, which are recorded
 “ in the books of Moses, which show that the universal pa-
 “ rent made choice of that nation, obstinate and stupid as it
 “ always was, to be the means of preserving in the world the
 “ true knowledge of himself, and the purity of his worship,
 “ amidst the universal degeneracy of the rest of mankind.—
 “ When we consider the kind of rage for the ceremonies of
 “ idolatrous religions, and the immorality they countenance,
 “ shown

* It has been objected to both Judaism and Christianity by Mr. Paine, that they teach wrong notions of the solar system, and of natural philosophy. He might have known that Christians in general, suppose the writers of the scriptures to have conformed to the language of the times, as it does not appear to have been the intention of the Almighty to instruct men respecting these subjects. Whatever might have happened in *former times*, Christians in general, *at present* hold the same opinion about that system which Mr. Paine does, and they do not conceive it at all inconsistent with their respect for those books, nor with their Christian profession.

“ shown by all nations ; how can we account for Abraham
 “ abandoning the religion of his country (to say nothing of
 “ his removing to so great a distance from it) and the Israelites,
 “ when they were become a nation, relinquishing the rites
 “ of the Egyptians, and adopting a religion and ceremonies
 “ of so very different a nature ? This is what no nation ever
 “ did of a sudden voluntarily, or could ever be brought to do
 “ involuntarily, by ordinary means ; and that this was invo-
 “ luntary on the part of the Israelites is most evident, from
 “ their frequent relapses into their former superstitions, from
 “ which they were with great difficulty reclaimed. The
 “ only possible explanation of this wonderful *fact*, I will
 “ venture to say, is to be found in the books of Moses, and
 “ other writings of the old testament, in which we have an
 “ authentick account of the frequent interpositions of the di-
 “ vine Being, to bring about so great an event by miracles,
 “ which the obstinacy and incredulity of that nation, great as
 “ they always were, were not able to withstand.—If we
 “ consider the miracles of which we have an account in the
 “ books of Moses (which were unquestionably written at the
 “ time when they are said to have been performed) we see
 “ them to have been wonderfully calculated to produce this
 “ effect ; and they were of such a nature, as that no nation
 “ whatever could have been deceived into the belief of them,
 “ even if they had been as well disposed, as we know they
 “ were ill disposed, towards the object of them. When the
 “ great scene opens, the Israelites were in the most abject state
 “ of slavery in Egypt, without the least prospect of relief, their
 “ oppressors being a warlike nation, themselves unused to
 “ arms, and no foreign power to take their part. Yet though
 “ these warlike Egyptians, who derived the greatest advan-
 “ tages from their servitude, did every thing in their power
 “ to detain them, they actually marched out of the country,
 “ without leaving any part of their property behind ; they
 “ passed forty years in a wilderness, from which so great a
 “ multitude could not have derived sufficient sustenance ; and
 “ they took possession of a country occupied by several nu-
 “ merous and warlike nations. Such are the *facts*, and I see
 “ no probable method of accounting for them, but upon the
 “ supposition of the truth of those miracles, which are re-
 “ corded in the writings of Moses, and which explain the
 “ whole in a most satisfactory manner.”—After illustrating
 this, the Doctor proceeds : “ such is the account that the books
 “ of Moses and Joshua give of these things, and to say nothing

“ of the internal marks of credibility in the writings of Moses,
 “ which bear as evident marks of authenticity, as any narra-
 “ tive, or journal of events, that was ever written: the mi-
 “ racles introduced into the history, supply the only possible
 “ hypothesis to account for the rest. A fact which cannot be
 “ denied, is the *belief* of all the Israelitish nation, from that
 “ time to the present, that such events did take place, that
 “ the history we now have of them was written by Moses
 “ himself, till near the time of his death, and that the nar-
 “ rative was continued by other persons, who recorded the
 “ events of their own times.—If the antiquity of the books
 “ of Moses, &c. be denied, it still remains to be accounted
 “ for, how all the nation could, at any period of time, be
 “ made to believe that their ancestors had come from Egypt,
 “ through the Red Sea, and the river Jordan, and that such
 “ a *law* as theirs, had been delivered in an audible voice
 “ from Mount Sinai, when none of those things had ever
 “ happened. This is not more probable, than that the Eng-
 “ lish nation should at this time be brought to believe, that
 “ their ancestors originally came from France, and that they
 “ crossed from Calais to Dover without ships. An attempt
 “ to impose upon a whole nation such an account as this, and
 “ especially a history of the events said to have been written
 “ at the time, when nothing of the kind had been heard of
 “ before, would at any period be treated with ridicule and
 “ neglect. No people ever were, or ever can be, so im-
 “ posed upon, especially when the things proposed to them are
 “ so disagreeable and burthensome, as the laws of Moses
 “ certainly were to the Jewish nation.—The whole body
 “ of the Jewish nation, attached as they formerly were to the
 “ superstitions of their neighbours, never entertained a doubt
 “ with respect to any of the contents of the books of Moses.
 “ That there were such persons as Abraham, Isaac, and Ja-
 “ cob, Moses, and Aaron, &c. and that the things recorded
 “ of them were true, they always believed, as firmly as we
 “ do the history of Julius Cæsar, or William the Conqueror;
 “ and though the nation has continued several thousand years,
 “ and has been near two thousand years dispersed among all
 “ other nations, their belief in the ancient history of their na-
 “ tion, and their respect for the books which contain it, are
 “ not in the least diminished. There is no example of any
 “ other nation suffering as the Jews have done, without being
 “ utterly lost, and confounded with the common mass of
 “ mankind, and their religious customs disappearing with
 “ them.

“ them.—This alone, I will venture to say, is a fact which
 “ no philosopher can account for, without admitting the au-
 “ thenticity of the books which contain the principles of the
 “ Jewish religion, and the truth of the miracles by which it
 “ was proved to be divine.”

With respect to the authenticity of the Jewish scriptures, I shall content myself with remarking, that Jews and Christians have agreed in receiving them ; that we have many old versions and paraphrases of them, one of them made about three hundred years before Christ, and not materially differing ; that the different Jewish sects concurred in receiving them ; that they carry strong internal marks of veracity ; and that the forgery of them would have been attended with considerable, if not insurmountable difficulties.

LETTER

LETTER XIV.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

IT is my intention in the present letter, to refer you to some prophecies in the old testament, and make a few brief remarks on them. I shall first notice some prophecies relating to various nations which had connections with the Jews.— And 1st, the prophecies concerning the posterity of Abraham by Ishmael have been wonderfully fulfilled, and the *present race of the Arabians*, who are chiefly descended from Ishmael, is an attestation of their truth and divinity. See Genesis xvi, 6, 12. xxi, 13, 20. I shall now observe, that the descendants of Ishmael were a considerable nation in very early times, and under Mahomet and his successors, the Arabs extended their conquests over a great part of the world. All the northern coasts of Africa abound with Arabs, and Palæstine is now almost entirely occupied by them; they still retain their ancient seats, and are as numerous there as ever. It was said that Ishmael should be a *wild man*, and the Arabs are wild and intractable even to a proverb. It was said *that his hand should be against every man, and every man's hand against him*; and it is well known, that the Arabs, and probably the Arabs only, of all the nations of the world, have constantly lived in a state of hostility against all mankind, plundering their neighbours and all travellers who are obliged to pass through any part of their country. It seems to be intimated by Ishmael's *dwelling in the midst of all his brethren*, that his posterity should *continue to dwell among them*, and to subsist as a separate nation, notwithstanding this state of constant hostility; and it is truly remarkable, that, though the conquest of Arabia has been attempted by almost all the great empires, which have bordered upon them, it has never yet been subdued, and no nation ever made the attempt without repenting of it; having met with nothing but disgrace and loss. This was most remarkably the case in the time of Trajan, the most warlike of all the Roman emperors, and, when the empire was in its greatest strength.* This prophecy was *certainly* in existence above two thousand years ago, probably above four thousand,

* Priestley's Institutes of natural and revealed Religion. Vol. I. page 404, &c.

thousand, and we see the accomplishment of it extending to our own times : could this have been the effect of human foresight, or does the writer *in shooting his long bow, only strike within a thousand miles of a mark ?* When Nineveh and Babylon were in all their power and splendour, their utter destruction was foretold, and with respect to the latter, the time and manner, and even the name of the conqueror. If they were delivered when we are told they were, and there is no good reason I know of for doubting it, then they have been surprizingly and circumstantially fulfilled. This is certain that part of this prediction was that *wild beasts should dwell there, and it should no more be dwelt in from generation to generation.* Since the Christian æra, Babylon was not quite deserted of inhabitants. Lucian in the second century, says, that in a little time it would be sought for and not be found. In the fourth century, it was actually converted into a chace for keeping wild beasts ; since that time the walls have been destroyed, and now it is not known where it stood. In the time of Alexander the Great, Tyre was a place of importance ; to that time we can *certainly* trace the Jewish scriptures, if not much higher. These scriptures contain a prophecy that Tyre should be destroyed, and *should be a place for spreading of nets in the midst of the sea*, Ezech. xxvi, and speaking of the old city, that *it should never be found again.* Of old Tyre not a trace remains, and that which was built upon an island and called the *new city*, is now a heap of ruins and is only visited by a few *fishermen*.

The same Ezechiel prophesied of Egypt, that it should be *a base kingdom*, and that *there should be no more a prince of the land of Egypt*—see Ezech. xxix, xxx. From that time to the present, Egypt has never had a prince of its own, but has been successively under the power of different nations. Its present masters are the Turks, and its state of slavery is most abject indeed. These are most extraordinary *shots*, and the application of them the *whimsical conceits of sectaries, expounders and commentators !* But Mr. Paine does not read the bible, and perhaps, did not know any thing of the prophecies except from the flights of his own imagination. Respecting the Jews themselves,, Moses foretold amongst other things, that *the Lord would scatter them among all people, from one end of the earth unto the other. And among those nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest, but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart, and fainting of eyes, and sorrow of mind.*—Deut. xxviii, 62, &c. There are numerous

merous other striking circumstances, all of which are *distinctly* foretold, and which we *see* verified by the present circumstances which make that nation so remarkable over the whole world. Strongly prejudiced, indeed, must be the mind of the man who can account for these predictions by human sagacity, or can imagine any other foundation of them than the foreknowledge of that Being who made and directs all things. I shall add, that there are many prophecies respecting Christ in the old testament, in books certainly published long before his appearance; which could not have been inserted since, or the Jews must have detected it, which though otherwise explained by the Jews, who yet expect the accomplishment of them, seem to be free from all obscurity or equivocalness; and which were so applied by Christ himself and his apostles.

Of these, one of the most striking is, that beginning at the 13th verse of the 52nd chapter of Isaiah, and continuing thro' the remainder of that and the 53d chapter. See also Daniel ix, 24, &c.—Isaiah, xi, 3.—Malachi iii, 1, &c. with many others scattered through the prophetick writings, and which many authors have collected and explained. “You will bear in mind,” as Archdeacon Paley observes, “what has been often, and, I think, truly urged by the advocates of Christianity, that there is no other eminent person to the history of whose life, so many circumstances can be made to apply. They who object, that much has been done by the power of chance, the ingenuity of accommodation, and the industry of research; ought to try whether the same, or any thing like it, could be done, if Mahomet or any other person were proposed as the subject of Jewish prophecy.” I will now ask you, whether we may not justly consider these prophecies as great corroborations of the truth of the Jewish and Christian dispensations? and whether they are not to be ranked in a very different class from the oracles in the heathen nations, and from those predictions of which we often hear so much in *these* days, which are either the result of human sagacity in discerning probable events, at no great distance of time, or the effects of a heated imagination, which may never be fulfilled in any degree, or perhaps interpretations of the ancient Jewish and Christian prophecies which remain to be fulfilled? To dignify such writings or expressions with the name of *prophecies*, is exalting them to a rank which they seem to have no pretensions to.

LETTER

LETTER XV.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

I PROPOSED lastly to consider whether there is evidence of a like nature, to prove that Mahomet was a prophet sent from God, or whether we are able to discover strong marks of imposture, and to perceive a material difference between the evidences of his religion, and that of Christ. My reason for noticing this is, because Mahomet laid claim to the character of a prophet, because the religion established by him has spread through a very great part of the world, and because Mr. Paine has thought fit to place him on a level with Moses and Christ. To enable you to form a judgment on the subject, I shall briefly mention the following particulars:

1. Mahomet did not found his pretensions upon *miracles*, properly so called, that is upon proofs of supernatural agency capable of being known, and attested by others. Christians are warranted in this assertion by the Koran itself, which not only does not relate any miracles but in a manner disclaims them, while it acknowledges them to have been wrought by Moses and Jesus. The visits of Gabriel, the night journey of Mahomet to heaven, and the delivery of the Koran, rest on the bare assertion of Mahomet, and deserve not the name of *sensible* miracles. This want of *attested miracles* is a great deficiency in the religion of Mahomet.

2. Mahomet was the grandson of the most powerful and honourable family in Mecea, and though by circumstances, he did not inherit a fortune suitable to his birth, he had, long before the commencement of his mission, repaired this deficiency by an opulent marriage. A person of high descent, and nearly allied to the chiefs of his country, would not fail, as a religious teacher, to attract attention and followers.

3. Mahomet conducted his design at first especially, with great art and prudence. He first applied to and gained some of his own family, and a few persons of rank, making in all fourteen persons; this took up three years, during which all was transacted in secret. Afterwards, with the help of these friends, and under the powerful protection of his family, he began to preach publicly, and continued it for nine

or ten years, and though there was no *established* religion to contend with, he made no very great number of profelytes.

4. Mahomet formed his scheme of religion so as to conciliate not only the Arabians, but also Jews, and Christians. He set out with the great doctrine of the strict and exclusive unity of God, and acknowledged the divine missions of Moses, and Christ, adding that he was sent to restore the truth which had been corrupted by their followers.

5. Two purposes pervade the institution of Mahomet contained in the Koran, namely to make converts, and to make his converts soldiers. This is evident from his telling the Jews, Christians, and Pagan Arabs, that the religion which he taught, was no other than had been originally their own; from his never ceasing to describe the future anguish of unbelievers in terms calculated to inspire the greatest terror; from his voluptuous paradise, described in the most glowing colours, and suited to the passion of his followers; from his reserving the highest heaven for those who fought his battles, or expended their fortunes in his cause; and from his compliance with the passions of the people in warm regions, in indulging his followers with respect to women, whilst he restrained them from inebriating liquors, though, by the way, he did not venture to prohibit wine till the seventeenth year of his mission, when military successes had established his authority. These circumstances will easily account for his attracting many followers.

6. After these twelve years peaceable preaching in Mecea, with no remarkable success, he went to Medina, another city of Arabia. In this place were great disturbances occasioned by the mutual persecutions of Jews and Christians, and of the different Christian sects, added to the hereditary contentions of two hostile tribes. The religion of Mahomet presented a point of union, embracing the principles which were common to all, and met therefore with some success, though not very considerable, till a political association introduced Mahomet into Medina, and placed the government in his hands. From this time he discovered his views, and pretended to a commission to attack the infidels, to destroy idolatry, and to set up the true faith by the sword. He was victorious in many battles, his successors were so likewise, and Mahometanism became the prevailing religion of Asia.

7. Mahometanism never gained converts in consequence of an examination into the grounds of it, among persons not interested in the reception of it. In what country was this religion ever generally received, in which the ruling powers opposed it, and persecuted it, or in which the ruling powers were not previously Mahometans?

Other circumstances might be mentioned, but I shall content myself with these, and shall leave it to yourselves to remark, how very different was the origin and progress of Christianity.*

* Paley's evidences of Christianity, vol. 3, and Priestley's letters to a philosophical unbeliever, vol. 2, letter 11.

LETTER XVI.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

I HAVE now finished the work I undertook. I have established, I hope to your satisfaction, that Jesus Christ was a person with divine authority; that this is proved to us by miracles and prophecy; and that the scriptures containing his doctrines deserve to be considered as the *word of God*. In doing this, I have endeavoured carefully to abstain from all those arguments which could have no weight except with Christians, and also to confine myself to the proof of those things which all Christians agree in believing, and on which they build those doctrines by which particular sects are distinguished. Should doubts still remain on the minds of any of you, don't be discouraged, nor consider the subject as exhausted. These letters are only a compilation from the works of the many excellent writers to whom I have occasionally referred, and from the hasty manner in which they have been drawn up under many disadvantages, it is probable, notwithstanding some corrections of kind friends, not only that there are many defects in the style and method which might have been rectified, but what is of more consequence, that some arguments have been omitted, and others weakened by ill-timed abbreviation; but their speedy publication appeared to be an object of the greatest importance. The same motive which has induced me to publish these letters, will also lead me to remove any difficulties which may occur to a sincere enquirer after truth, as far as lies in my power, and I make no doubt that there are many others who, on being applied to, will be found equally willing.

The immoral lives, and bitter dissensions of Christians, have been often brought as an argument against Christianity; this is a very unfair argument, but however let me entreat you to take away this reproach. Show by your behaviour, that whatever be your speculative opinions, you consider moral conduct as pleasing in the sight of God, and the one thing needful; above all let me exhort you, as children of the same Almighty Father, who is the author of all the good we enjoy, as followers of Jesus our common master, whom we all profess to love and reverence; and as persons travelling the same great road to glory, honour and immortality—to cultivate love one for another, to put away from you all religious

ligious animosities, and to show yourselves Christians, not in outward profession only, but in deed and in truth, acting according to the precepts of Christ. Wishing you all happiness both for time, and for eternity,

I am, &c.

T. D. HINCKS.

THE END.

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